

CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE DANCE DEPARTMENT

PRESENTS

WONDERLAND

BY

Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet

 Alexander Gamayunov in Wonderland
photo: David Cooper



STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

NAC 2010-2011 DANCE SEASON

Cathy Levy, Dance Producer

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Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet

WONDERLAND

NAC Dance ~ Student Matinee

Date: Thursday, April 28th 2011

Running Time: 2 hours, starting at 12:30 pm

Location: Southam Hall, National Arts Centre

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE STUDENT MATINEE IS A DRESS REHEARSAL, WHICH MAY INVOLVE STOPS AND STARTS DURING THE PERFORMANCE.

RWB Tara Birrell/Robb & Jaclyn Lohay in Wonderland photo: David Cooper



Credits

Artistic Director of Royal Winnipeg Ballet.....**André Lewis**
Choreographer **Shawn Hounsell**
Composers**John Estacio, Brian Current, Josef Strauss**
Costume Design **Anne Armit**
Set Design**Guillaume Lord**
Lighting Design**Hugh Conacher**
Soundscape Design**Nicolas Bernier**
Video Projection Design**Jimmy Lakatos, TURBINE**
Make-Up Design**Jane McKay**
Dancers.....**The Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company**

One of Canada's "MUST-SEE EVENTS" in dance for 2011

- The Globe and Mail

"We all create our own Wonderland inside our heads. I'm inviting the audience to join Alice as she invents her special fantasy world."

- Shawn Hounsell, Choreographer of *Wonderland*

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

For your students to have the best experience possible, we have prepared a small outline of what is expected of them as audience members. As a teacher bringing your students to a performance at the NAC, please keep in mind that you are responsible for the behaviour of your students.

Being an audience member is as essential to the ballet performance as the dancers themselves. What helps to make a show a success is in part how the audience reacts to it, whether through applause, laughter or surprise. Discuss proper audience etiquette with students before the performance. Arrive approximately half an hour before show time to get settled in to enjoy the show.

AUDIENCE ROLE ACTIVITY CHECKLIST

Children should be encouraged to:

- ✓ Freely react to the performance within reason (please no yelling). Dancers love to hear applause for something done well, or something you enjoyed seeing. There is no right or wrong time to show your appreciation for what you see on stage. Be appropriate in displaying your level of enjoyment. Some audience members may not share your taste in humour and be overtly bothered by boisterous behaviour.
- ✓ Clap at the end of a dance (when there is a pause in the music) if you feel like showing appreciation.
- ✓ Watch in a quiet concentrated way. This supports the dancers so they can do their best work on stage.
- ✓ Enjoy the music and look at the sets and costumes.
- ✓ Consider that constructive criticism is always appreciated more than purely negative criticism.
- ✓ Go into viewing the performance with one or two questions in mind: What is the choreographer trying to tell you about this piece? How are the designers's incorporating different design elements like multi-media into the performance?
- ✓ While viewing the performance, design more questions as they arise.
- ✓ Remember, to turn off cell phones and no recording devices are allowed.

Children should not:

- ✿ Move about in the seats or get up to leave during a performance (except in an emergency situation).
- ✿ Eat, drink, speak aloud, or otherwise cause a disturbance to those around you (these things are not only a distraction to other audience members, but also to the performers on stage, which can be dangerous for them.)
- ✿ Have cell phones, pagers, portable game devices turned on during the show.

CANADA'S 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.

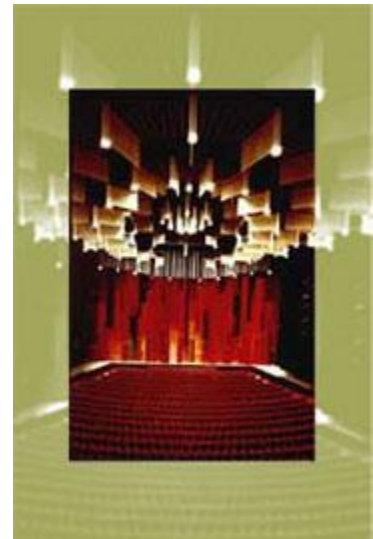


Built in the shape of a hexagon, the design became the architectural leitmotif for Canada's premier performing arts centre. Situated in the heart of the nation's capital across Confederation Square from Parliament Hill, the National Arts Centre is among the largest performing arts complexes in Canada. 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. *Wonderland* will be performed in Southam Hall, a 2323 seat theatre.

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 NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE



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 fourth 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 three 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathy' in a cursive, flowing script.

CATHY LEVY
DANCE PRODUCER, NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ORCHESTRA

Consistent praise has followed this vibrant orchestra throughout its history of touring both nationally and internationally, recording, and commissioning Canadian works. Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra, now under the direction of renowned conductor/ violinist/ violist Pinchas Zukerman, continues to draw accolades both abroad and at its home in Ottawa where it gives over 100 performances a year.

The NAC Orchestra was founded in 1969 as the resident orchestra of the newly opened National Arts Centre, with Jean-Marie Beaudet as Music Director and Mario Bernardi as founding conductor and (from 1971) Music Director until 1982. He was succeeded by Franco Mannino (1982 to 1987), Gabriel Chmura (1987 to 1990), and Trevor Pinnock (1991-1997). In April 1998, Pinchas Zukerman was named Music Director of the NAC Orchestra.

In addition to a full series of subscription concerts at the National Arts Centre each season, tours are undertaken to regions throughout Canada and around the world. Since the arrival of Pinchas Zukerman, education has been an extremely important component of these tours. Teacher Resource Kits have been developed for distribution to elementary schools in the regions toured and across Canada, and the public has been able to follow each tour through fully interactive websites which are now archived on the NAC's Performing Arts Education Website at www.ArtsAlive.ca.

The NAC Orchestra offers a number of programs dedicated to fostering a knowledge and appreciation of music among young people. In addition to a highly popular subscription series of *TD Canada Trust Family Adventures with the NAC Orchestra*, the Orchestra presents a variety of opportunities for schools to learn about classical music: *Student Matinees*, and *Open Rehearsals* to allow students to hear the Orchestra perform in its home at the NAC. In addition, *Musicians in the Schools* programs including ensemble performances and instrument sectionals take the music to the students in their schools.

CANADA'S ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET

“The company has never looked more resplendent, more assured, or more ravishing... a triumph for the indefatigable prairie troupe, a jewel box of sumptuous dancing...at every moment, the energy and youth radiating from the stage is palpable.”

- The Vancouver Sun

“...In a time when everything is possible, dance is first and foremost an expression of joie de vivre, and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet does a marvelous job at capturing this essence.”

- Le Droit (Ottawa)

Versatility, technical excellence and a captivating style are the trademarks of Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet, qualities that have garnered both critical and audience acclaim. These qualities keep the RWB in demand as it presents more than 150 performances every season.

Founded in 1939 by Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet holds the double distinction of being Canada's premier ballet company and the longest continuously operating ballet company in North America. In 1953, the Company received its royal title, the first granted under the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1958, Arnold Spohr was appointed Artistic Director. Under his direction the Royal Winnipeg Ballet grew and developed to take its place among the world's internationally renowned companies.

In 1996, André Lewis was named Artistic Director of Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet. A native of Hull, Quebec, Mr. Lewis has maintained a thirty year association with the RWB. He joined the RWB School's Professional Division in 1975, entered the company's corps de ballet in 1979 and was promoted to soloist in 1982. He was asked to join the artistic staff in 1984 and was appointed Associate Artistic Director in 1990. During his tenure as Artistic Director, Lewis has worked to revitalize the company's repertoire, especially with the commissioning of new full-length ballets such as *Dracula*, *Nutcracker*, *The Magic Flute* and *Moulin Rouge – The Ballet*.

The repertoire of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet embraces a wide array of dance styles, which includes classical story ballets and an intriguing collection of shorter dances. The RWB achieves a fine balance between the classical traditions of Europe and the boldness of contemporary ballet, which in turn has produced a unique style.

This is Alice like you've never seen her before!

Choreographer's notes:

Wonderland is a dynamic re-interpretation of **Lewis Carroll's** beloved characters, events and themes that is sure to surprise and delight. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is the tale of a young girl who follows a white rabbit down a hole and discovers a strange and fantastic world full of surprise and bewilderment, a place where the unexpected is expected and nothing is quite as it seems.

Why the adult preoccupation with a children's story? What is so special about this little girl? I believe we recognize ourselves in the character of Alice, that her desire to escape from the ordinary appeals to our own yearning for escape. That, like her, we use fantasy to hide from the mundane reality of our everyday lives. This is why we have chosen to follow her down the rabbit hole time and time again. The Queen of Hearts, The White Rabbit, and the Mad Hatter are all on hand, displaying generous doses of wit, camp and humour.

In my *Wonderland*, Alice is an older woman looking back and remembering a beautiful dream. Slowly, as bits of memory stitch together, the tale is told anew, this time coloured by a lifetime of impressions and experiences, as much ours as they are Alice's.

The surreal and dark elements that lurk at the original story's fringes are bravely realized in explosive passages of breathtaking dance and innovative multimedia. I have transformed *Wonderland* into a multi-sensory experience, with edgy and athletic movement, an inventive electro-acoustic soundscape and unexpected visual treats.

Shawn Hounsell – Choreographer of *Wonderland*
January 2011

World Premiere of *Wonderland* (Royal Winnipeg Ballet): March 9, 2011
Wonderland was co-produced with The Banff Centre

STORY SYNOPSIS OF *WONDERLAND* BALLET

ACT 1

Alice revisits the infamous dream, falling back into the world of her imagination, but the story is a little different this time. Alice is chasing the White Rabbit. She follows him down a deep hole – tumbling through the spinning vortex – and, reaching the bottom, is mysteriously surrounded by a bizarre gang of ‘Tooney Loones.’ Madness ensues.

Attracted to an unexplained bottle, Alice drinks its contents and shrinks to a fraction of her original size. Here, she finds herself in a hall of doors and is faced with the impossible task of sorting out which door leads where. Her investigation is interrupted when a delicious looking cupcake appears and the words “Eat Me.” After taking a bite, Alice grows to ten times her normal size.

Frustrated by the incoherence of it all, Alice cries and cries and, at the same time, she shrinks and shrinks. Her tears form a pool of water that, the now pint-sized, Alice must swim through to avoid drowning in. Accompanied by a coy mouse with a sleeping disorder, a seductive group of winged companions and a strange assortment of other creatures, Alice conquers this challenge and carries on.

Next up, Alice encounters the sly Cheshire Cat who steers her toward the house of the Duchess wherein a terrific brawl is taking place. Frightened, Alice takes refuge in the forest where she is stopped by a mysterious Caterpillar who envelopes her in smoky self-reflection with the enigmatic and unsettling query, “Who ... are ... you?”

From here, Alice happens upon a private party hosted by the Mad Hatter and the March Hare. The Act concludes with Alice, always the odd man out, very much confused by the frenzied activity and greatly concerned about her impending rendez-vous with the infamous Queen of Hearts.

 Jacelyn Lobay in *Wonderland*
photo: David Cooper



ACT 2

At the opening of Act 2, we discover Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum in a garden, engaged in a frantic but dubious attempt to convert all of the white roses to red. Alice staggers into the garden unknowingly and is swept up in the anticipatory preparation for the Queen's arrival.

Red carpet and all, the Queen of Hearts enters and a crazed and demented game of dance begins. The Queen proceeds to wreak havoc on the event and on poor Alice herself. Accidentally finding herself alone with the Queen, Alice is enticed into trying one of the Queen's tarts.

With the help of Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, Alice escapes into another part of the forest where she discovers a sensual Garden of Live Flowers and, shortly thereafter, a Griffon and a Turtle. By this point, Alice is vaguely aware of how far she has come and how much has happened to her however she has absolutely no idea how she might find her way home. As she ponders this, the White Rabbit appears again and Alice is reminded of how this outlandish adventure began.

Meanwhile, the Queen's tarts are gone and Alice's name is all over it. Slowly, characters begin to reappear in anticipation of the Queen's final verdict and the spectacular showdown which is most certain to erupt. Alice, frightened and confused, escapes through the front door.

She wakes up. The story begins again.

 Tara Birtwhistle in Wonderland
photo: David Cooper



WATCHING AND APPRECIATING DANCE

CURRICULUM CONNECTION – Reflecting, Responding and Analysing

Attending Dance Matinees at the NAC, and using questions and activities here and in Student Activity Section, are intended to develop students' competency in applying *The Critical Analysis Process* for all grades, in The Arts (Ontario) Curriculum Grades 1-12.

A ballet is a choreographic composition interpreted by the dancers. Each dancer tells a story in movement and pantomime. Watch the show and look for the choreography, the movement, gestures and facial expressions of each dancer and how they work in relationship to each other. In dance there are basic elements that are always present in this live art form, where the body is the dancer's instrument of expression. Try to recognize the elements of dance such as the placement of the body, whether the body is moving through space or on the spot, type and quality of the movement, the timing and musicality, how space is used, the energy and the relationship between the dancers. Each person watching may have different interpretations about what they saw and how they felt. All are valid.

During the show, watch for:

- ✓ The dancer's movements, such as the dance technique used of jumps, pirouettes, and ballet positions of the feet, as well as the emotions and facial expressions used.
- ✓ How the dancers use the space on stage.
- ✓ Your real impressions of the piece during the show, for example: excitement, curiosity, frustration, surprise, sadness, humour etc.
- ✓ The combination of sequences or *enchaînements* and shapes on stage.
- ✓ The relationship between the choreography, the music, the props, costumes and set.

LESSON PLANS

Introduction Activity

ALL GRADE LEVELS

Class Time 4-6 periods

A YEAR IN WONDERLAND - follow the RWB Company as they journey through the rabbit hole into the 'wonderland' of dance creation. These comprehension questions have been created for students to track the creation process in this internet series produced by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and its innovative production of Wonderland.

You can find all the episodes at www.rwb.org/wonderland

EPISODE ONE PART 1- It will be Curiouser...

Video Running Time: 2mins 44 seconds

- 1.) What did some of the principal dancers call this type of dance?
- 2.) The dancers make comments about aching bodies, do you think these dancers have to be physically fit like athletes and why. Compare the qualities of professional dancers with professional athletes. What are their similarities and differences?

EPISODE ONE PART 2- Twelve Months 'til Curtain

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 07 seconds

- 1.) What is the main purpose of the 'movement investigation' by the dancers based on the initial choreography planned out by Shawn Hounsell?
- 2.) What types of music did Shaun introduce to the dancers to create the dance?

EPISODE TWO PART 1- Saint-Saveur Approaches

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 33 seconds

- 1.) What is a 'work in progress' show and why do this?
- 2.) What type of world did Shawn call this 'work in progress' show?
- 3.) What happened to the soloist Yosuke Minoi who plays the White Rabbit?

EPISODE TWO PART 2- Performance at Saint-Saveur

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 27 seconds

- 1.) What was the backup plan that Shawn had in mind to replace the injured dancer for the 'work in progress' show?
- 2.) What was the idea of doing these pieces of work out of context?
- 3.) How did the dancers compensate for not having any costumes or props during the performance?

EPISODE THREE PART 1- Twelve Becomes Twenty-Seven

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 16 seconds

- 1.) What's exciting for the dancers now that the rest of the company has joined the production?
- 2.) What steps can Shawn do with the entire company present at rehearsal?
- 3.) What tactics does Shawn do to teach new movement to dancers?

EPISODE THREE PART 2- New characters, new scenes...

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 18 seconds

- 1.) Why does Shawn want everyone to know all the parts before he casts.

EPISODE FOUR PART 1- A peek at Wardrobe..

Video Running Time: 2 minutes 28 seconds

- 1.) What is different about the process of making costumes for this production?
- 2.) How fast did the designers come up with the sketches for the show?
- 3.) What was the inspiration for tweedle dee and tweedle dum?
- 4.) What are the flamingos really going to look like?

EPISODE FOUR PART 2- Harrison in Wonderland

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 50 seconds

- 1.) How did the dancer Harrison James come to be in this production?
- 2.) Why does 'interpreting' dance choreography work for Wonderland?

EPISODE FIVE PART 1- Tweedles and a Hare

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 12 seconds

- 1.) Who choreographed the tweedles dance movement and how?
- 2.) Why is it uncomfortable for the March Hare dancer to vocalize?

EPISODE FIVE PART 2- Models and Broken Dishes

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 47 seconds

- 1.) What did Shawn want the dancers to visualize when creating the flowers scene?
- 2.) How do the dancers interpret this scene? What are some of their comments?
- 3.) From the point of view of the dancers, what is exciting about playing either the Mad Hatter or the Mouse.

EPISODE SIX PART 1- She's the flower, We're the Flower Pot

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 40 seconds

- 1.) What is the structure of the Caterpillar and how is the movement of this character described?
- 2.) What do the Looney toons do?

EPISODE SIX PART 2- Bring Your Bubblegum to Rehearsal

Video Running Time: 2 minutes 11 seconds

- 1.) What unorthodox props and metaphors does Shawn use to help the dancers discover their roles in rehearsal?

EPISODE SEVEN PART 1- Cosmetic Creature Conjuring

Video Running Time: 3 minutes 16 seconds

- 1.) What was the challenge of the make-up design?
- 2.) What are the elements of stage make up and what are the goals of the makeup artist?

JUNIOR

GRADE LEVEL 6-8 LANGUAGE ARTS

CLASS TIME 1-3 periods (synopsis reading only)
 8-10 periods (reading of original text)

Objective: Students will be prepared with context for the viewing of the production *Wonderland*. The culminating activity will be done after the performance.

Choreographer Shaun Hounsell went back to Lewis Carroll's original 1865 text and based the work on places where today's audiences might discover their own wonderland. The result is a ballet geared to conjure contemporary ways of escaping: into film or music or the circus.

Minds on: (Whole Class)

Read a version of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or the synopsis of the production of *Wonderland* in class. Then try to answer the questions below.

(Pairs)

What are the names of the characters?

Describe the writing style used to tell the story of the original story of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Write a short paragraph, or synopsis, to tell the story in your own words.

What is the climax of the story?

What are the symbolic elements of the plot?

What are the main themes of the story?

Action: (Individual)

Draw a story board with six scenarios that illustrate the DANCE PRODUCTION SYNOPSIS by FINDING DESIGN IMAGES OF BODIES IN MOTION. Students should have six images that depict dynamic movement and energy they saw in the production. Students can cut out images or draw if they feel like. Under each image, they should have one word that describes what character or setting it is.

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JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE

GRADE LEVELS 6-9 LANGUAGE AND DANCE AND DRAMA

CLASS TIME 1-2 periods (Language classes) 3-5 periods (Drama classes)

OBJECTIVE: Create dance and movement in response to viewing performance of *Wonderland*. Interpret and communicate the meaning of movement and character development. Students will be provided opportunities to assume roles of characters whose lives and experiences are different than their own.

Minds on: (pairs)

Choose one of the characters from the production (ALICE, THE MAD HATTER, THE RED QUEEN, THE WHITE RABBIT, TWEEDLE DEE, TWEEDLE DUM). How would you describe this character? Fill out a characters card for it.

Materials: Index Cards

Character Card:

Character:

Character description:

Colour that describes the character:

How does the character move?

How would you describe the relationship to the other characters?

To ALICE:

To MAD HATTER:

To RED QUEEN:

To THE WHITE RABBIT:

To THE MARCH HARE:

To Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum:

To the people who inhabit *Wonderland* like the flamingoes, the loonies toons:

Action: (groups)

Explore movement characteristics of the different characters based on Body, Energy, Space and Time concepts outlined below.

What are the dynamic movement qualities of each character?

Do they move quickly or slowly, high or low, quirky or pedestrian?

What energy do they project?

How much space does each character use: the whole space or just a small area of space?

Then, assign each student a character and build a tableau (freeze-image) all together that shows the relationship among the characters. Explore how they interact in movement and in stillness. Students work in groups to create tableaux from the production and create dramatic “stills” as a framework for the dance. Then have each group create steps based on how each character moves to create movement phrases linking the tableaux and moving in the space. Play with different choreographic concepts, such as unison, canon, repetition, alternate facings, and variations in level to build a choreographic structure.

Assessment can be an expanded rubric BEST (Body, Energy, Space and Time) acronym.

According to the exemplars of Dance and Drama in the Ontario Ministry of Education, the fundamental components of dance include space, shape, time (rhythm), and energy. The following must be considered.

Space: How is the space being used? Is it being used in an interesting way in a variety of formations? The composition is design in space: the paths and patterns the dancer traces in the performance area.

- Straight line
- Scattered throughout the room
- Semi-circle
- Triangle
- Star

How is the body moving in the space?

- Forward-backward, advancing, retreating
- Direct-indirect
- Straight line
- Angular
- Curved

Shape: What is the body doing? This refers to the configuration of his or her torso and limbs into positions that change over time. Professional dancers train for many years to make their bodies flexible and responsive, able to assume long lines that are straight or curved, or jagged, angular contours. These shapes are linked with transitional movements.

- Are you using a variety of levels (high, medium, low)
- Are you using your whole body or parts of your body?

What shapes is the body making?

- Twisted, stretched, curved
- Interconnected
- Symmetrical-asymmetrical

Time: How is timing being utilized? Are there variations in pace and rhythm?

- Still-staccato
- Fast-slow-moderate
- Long-short
- Sudden-sustained
- Even-uneven

Energy-Dynamics: What kinds of energy (dynamics) are being utilized? This has often been described as quality of movement, the intangible factor that adds uniqueness, richness and power. Below is a chart of Laban’s Effort Actions. (Rodolf von Laban created this technique still used today in the early 20th century.)

- Slow, sustained, quick or sudden. Bound-free, heavy- light

Movement Qualities of Laban’s Effort Actions - Exertions

Effort Action	Weight	Space	Time	As if
Punch	Heavy	Direct	Sudden	“striking like a boxer”
Slash	Heavy	Indirect	Sudden	“slicing tall grass with a sickle”
Dab	Light	Direct	Sudden	“catching a butterfly”
Flick	Light	Indirect	Sudden	“shooing away a mosquito”
Press	Heavy	Direct	Sustained	“moving a piano”
Wring	Heavy	Indirect	Sustained	“squeezing water from a towel”
Glide	Light	Direct	Sustained	“skimming along ice”
Float	Light	Indirect	Sustained	“wafting among the clouds”

JUNIOR, INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR

GRADE LEVELS: ALL LEVELS LANGUAGE AND DANCE AND DRAMA

CLASS TIME 2-4 periods, excluding viewing performance of *Wonderland*

OBJECTIVE: Creating a Dance/Theatre Review

Minds on: (Whole Class)

Students will be provided performing arts reviews before viewing the performance of *Wonderland*. They will then have in depth discussions and debate on the opinions provided by the reviewers. Included at the end of this guide are copies of two reviews, one from the Globe and Mail and one from the Winnipeg Free Press.

Action: (Whole Class) After viewing *Wonderland* students will then explore their own feelings and ideas of the performance and discuss as a whole group. Teacher will record their opinions.

Action: (Individual) Students will write their own review with detailed attention to persuasive writing.

INTERMEDIATE/SENIOR

GRADE LEVEL 10-12 PERFORMING ARTS PRODUCTION, DRAMA/DANCE

CLASS TIME

2-3 periods excluding the viewing of *Wonderland*

Prior Knowledge: This visual research activity is suited for students enrolled in a theatre production class or wanting to enroll in a focused drama production class in the future.

Materials: Bristol board, canvas, scissors, magazines, glue, newspapers, wall paper, rulers, pencils, colour pallets, pencil crayons, paint etc. (Encourage students to bring in their own material as well.)

Minds on - (whole class) *“Wonderland’ may be an illusion, but the story of Alice’s adventure goes on and on, and so, too, does fantasy. And just before the curtain goes down, we are met in that place between wakefulness and dreams, by the inevitable realization that we are the fantasy and that we, too, will end.”*

- Shawn Hounsell (Choreographer)

Discuss with students and brainstorm what elements of film and multi-media they think inspired the creation of this production?

Action: (pairs or individual) Have students create a collage of ideas or inspiration images for the beginning stages of their set design. Have a full class discussion first and brainstorm ideas on an anchor chart to identify mood, characters, setting, period, set shifts, concepts, feelings, colours, textures, images, etc. Consider the following questions.

What is the difference between “real” and “abstract”?

What kind of atmosphere do you want to create?

Which aspect of the story is most important to you?

How many props do you need on stage? Which props are most important?

Which special effects or aspects of the story would be difficult to bring to a stage?

How often would you change the setting according to the plot?

Explain your design concept in a few sentences. What do you want the audience to understand?

Students should be granted full directorial-producer status for the production concept and exemption from all budgetary and schedule concerns.

Using either a large Bristol board or canvas, students will create a collage that represents the inspiration for their set design. It should convey atmospheric textural elements like Tone and Mood, as well as a colour scheme. Students should create or find specific images that can be used to inspire a design and convey information that is expository as well as reflect the mood, atmosphere and socio-political setting.

SENIOR

GRADE LEVELS 11-12 ENGLISH, DRAMA, DANCE

Objective: Essay topic for Unit Study on *Alice in Wonderland* or Independent Unit Study on performing arts and literacy.

Our systems of fantasy – from literature, to theatre, cinema, the Internet, celebrity, fashion, sports and the infinite number of other ways we distract ourselves – are reflected and refracted throughout the work, so that, this time, we are not watching from the outside. This time, we are on the inside of ‘Wonderland,’ experiencing it for ourselves. This is our ‘Wonderland.’

- *Shawn Hounsell (Choreographer)*

Students can compare film versions to the multi-sensory experience they just encountered. What themes are tied into these versions to the original creation? Take into account that Shaun Hounsell went back to Carroll’s original 1865 text and based the work on places where today’s audiences might discover their own wonderland. The result is a ballet geared to conjure contemporary ways of escaping: into film or music or the circus. Compare and contrast the difference between any of these film versions and seeing the live performance.

- The first Disney Cartoon
- The Tim Burton version
- The live action version entitled *Looking through the Glass*
- The symbolism of the first *Matrix* film
- Episodes of *Lost* where they make references to the *Alice in Wonderland* distorted reality themes.

SENIOR

GRADE LEVELS 11-12 ENGLISH, DRAMA, DANCE

CLASS TIME UNIT STUDY on *Alice in Wonderland* paired with RWB's *Wonderland*

Objectives

Students will understand the following:

1. Lewis Carroll used nonsense and absurdity to comment on reality.
2. Surrealism in dance creation and theatre design elements.

Procedures

Minds on: (whole class)

1. Readers and critics of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* point out that the girl's experiences in the world at the bottom of the rabbit hole are similar to the dreams (sometimes, nightmares) that most human beings have. By exploring this observation further, you can help your students connect what Lewis Carroll was doing in words with what the surrealists in the early 20th century were doing with painting. The connection should increase students' appreciation of both modern literature and art, and multimedia theatre design, and perhaps help students to better understand the historical period of those writers and artists.

Begin this activity by asking students why they would agree with readers and critics who compare *Alice's Adventures* to human dreams or nightmares. Accept answers that are paraphrases of the following statements:

- The readers and critics are probably commenting on how much of Carroll's story is marked by whimsy, fantastic doings, and absurd developments or juxtapositions—just as dreams are.
 - Although reality in the Alice story sometimes seems like the reality we experience when we're fully conscious, more often the reality in the story is more similar to experiences we have in dreams. Alice's world, like many of our dreams, doesn't make logical sense (or so we think).
2. Leave the novel at this point, and explain to students the etymology of the art term *surrealism* by noting that certain painters in the early 20th century said their goal was to paint the "more real than real world behind the real." Another way of putting this remark is to say that the painters wanted to capture that which is *beyond* reality, a *super* reality, or, in the English term *surrealism*.
 4. Push students to try to articulate what the designers may have been saying in their multimedia set design and their comments about the society or culture that we are living in. Are the designers expecting these impossible possibilities to occur, or are they telling us that the world is simply impossible to fully understand because it's not what it seems to be?

5. Cite the writer Flannery O'Connor, who said that distortion is often a way of leading people to see the truth. Then ask, "What distortions did some of the design elements focus on? What truth do these distortions lead you the viewer to find or think about?"
6. Now return to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Ask, "What distortions do you notice in the book? What truth do these distortions lead you the reader to find or think about?"
7. Complete this activity by asking students to write one or two paragraphs in which they tell what they have learned about how both Carroll and the designers comment on reality.

Adaptations

You can also extend the lesson from the set design and substitute contemporary caricatures that exaggerate features of politicians or of other public figures—caricatures that, in effect, render the person absurd. Help your students see that Carroll, like the cartoonists, is exaggerating also in order to point out people's or society's shortcomings.

Extensions

Creative Comparison of Characters

Many small, weak, young, or innocent characters like Alice encounter characters who frighten or overpower them. Have students write a further adventure for Alice, in which she encounters a character from another literary work. Tell students that their episodes should incorporate Carroll's stylistic devices and philosophic beliefs: distortion, humour, and the triumph of the weak over the strong. Feel free to have students create a story in any genre they like.

School as Wonderland

Give the following assignment to students: Imagine that a youngster from another planet has just dropped through a hole of sorts and plops onto the floor of the main office of your school. Create movement choreography that shows which people and activities in your school would seem frightening, bizarre, or silly to such an adventurer. Have students form groups to do prewriting that will eventually lead to parodies of these people and activities. The prewriting notes should indicate how the dancers will distort people and activities for comic effect. Before students begin to rehearse, introduce the elements of dance—time, body, movement, shapes and transitions in chronological order. Instruct students to create movements or shapes using their bodies that coincide with their ideas.

SHAWN HOUNSELL- CHOREOGRAPHER

Born in Birch Hills, Saskatchewan, Canadian choreographer and artist Shawn Hounsell danced professionally with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal between 1989 and 2003. Noted for his versatility and theatricality, he danced soloist and principal roles in works by world-renowned choreographers such as Jiri Kylian, Ohad Naharin, Nacho Duato, Rudi van Dantzig, Anthony Tudor and Jose Limon.

An award winning choreographer, Shawn has created and staged pieces for numerous Canadian companies including the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Les Grands Ballet Canadiens de Montreal, Les Ballet Jazz de Montreal, Le Jeune Ballet du Quebec and Festival Dance Company. In addition his works have been performed by American companies such as Ballet Pacifica and in Europe by the Ballet of the National Theatre of Prague.

Shawn began his dance training as a theatre major in the B.F.A. program at the University of Saskatchewan where he studied with Irene Jaspar and Linda Rubin. In 1986 he joined the Professional Division of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. His choreography for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Fast Forward* choreographic workshop in 1990 was awarded the Paddy Stone Memorial Scholarship for artistic merit. Shawn joined the corps de ballet of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet later that year, and as a dancer was immediately challenged and rewarded with the diversity of the company's repertoire.

In 1991 Shawn choreographed his ballet *Jigsaw* for the *Fast Forward* workshop, and the following season it entered the repertoire of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, touring extensively through Canada and the Eastern USA to favourable acclaim. With his decision to join Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in 1995 came dancing roles in works by Nacho Duato, Ohad Naharin, José Limón and Jiří Kylián. In addition Shawn's choreography, *assurances and small gestures*, for the 1996 *À Suivre* choreographic workshop was commissioned by director Lawrence Rhodes for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens' *Maison de la Culture* performances in 1997. As the recipient of the 1997 Clifford E. Lee Award, presented annually to an emerging Canadian choreographer, Shawn also created a new work through a commission from the Banff Centre for the Arts for the Festival Dance Company. *Creaturehood* premiered in August of that year, and shortly thereafter joined the repertoire of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet for a Winnipeg premiere in 2000.

Wonderland, Hounsell's most recent collaboration with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, will have its world premiere in Winnipeg in March of 2011 before touring to cities throughout Western Canada and to Ottawa as a part of the National Arts Centre's Prairie Scene festival. Earlier this season, the RWB performed Hounsell's uniquely beautiful pas de deux *Led* in Israel as a part of the Company's 70th Anniversary Tour.

ABOUT BALLET

ballet – (noun) an artistic dance that usually tells a story or expresses a mood, performed by either a soloist or a group of dancers in a theatre, concert hall, etc.

balletic – (adjective) of or having to do with the ballet

balletomane – (noun) a person who is enthusiastic about ballet

The word ballet refers to a specific dance technique that has evolved over the last 350 years. Its roots lie in the royal courts of the 16th century. Ballet involves a combination of movement, music and design where emotions and stories are translated through precise body movement and facial expressions.

A Short History of Ballet

People have always danced. The first dances were part of religious and community ceremonies, but by the time of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, dancing had also become a form of entertainment. In the Middle Ages, the church in Europe claimed that dancing was sinful, but when the Renaissance arrived in the 1400s, dancing had become popular once again. It is in the European courts of the 16th and 17th centuries that the true origins of ballet lie.

The First Ballet

In 16th century France and Italy, royalty competed to have the most splendid court. Monarchs would search for and employ the best poets, musicians, and artists. At this time, dancing became increasingly theatrical. This form of entertainment, also called the *ballet de court* (court ballet), featured elaborate scenery and lavish costumes, plus a series of processions, poetic speeches, music and dancing. The first known ballet, *Le Ballet Comique* was performed in 1581 at the wedding of the Queen of France's sister.

The Sun King

In the 17th century, the popularity and development of ballet can be attributed to King Louis XIV of France. He took dancing very seriously and trained daily with his dance master, Beauchamp. One of his famous roles was the Rising Sun and this led him to become known as the "Sun King." King Louis also set up the Academie Royale de Danse (Royal Academy of Dance) in 1661, where for the first time steps were structurally codified and recorded by Beauchamp. These are the same steps that have been handed down through centuries, and which now form the basis of today's classical ballet style.

The First Professional Dancers

At first, ballets were performed at the Royal Court, but in 1669 King Louis opened the first opera house in Paris. Ballet was first viewed publicly in the theatre as part of the opera. The first opera featuring ballet, entitled *Pomone*, included dances created by Beauchamp. Women participated in ballets at court, but were not seen in the theatre until 1681. Soon, as the number of performances increased, courtiers who danced for a hobby gave way to professional dancers

who trained longer and harder. The physical movement of the first professional dancers was severely hindered by their lavish and weighty costumes and headpieces. They also wore dancing shoes with tiny heels and pointed toes, which made it rather difficult to dance.

Revealing Feet and Ankles

Early in the 18th century, the ballerina Marie Camargo shocked the audiences by shortening her skirts – to just above the ankle. She did this to be freer in her movements and to allow the audience to see her intricate footwork and complex jumps, which often rivalled those of the men. At this time, female dancers also began to dominate the stage over their male counterparts. Ballet companies were now being set up all over France to train dancers for the opera. The first official ballet company (a collection of dancers who train professionally) was based at the Paris Opera and opened in 1713.



Photo: Bruce Monk

The Pointe Shoe

By 1830, ballet as a theatrical art truly came into its own. Influenced by the Romantic Movement, which was sweeping the world of art, music, literature and philosophy, ballet took on a whole new look. The ballerina reigned supreme. Female dancers now wore calf-length, white bell-shaped tulle skirts. To enhance the image of the ballerina as light and elusive, the pointe shoe was introduced, enabling women to dance on the tips of their toes.

Classical Ballet

Although the term “classical” is often used to refer to traditional ballet, this term really describes a group of story ballets first seen in Russia at the end of the 19th century. At this time, the centre of ballet moved from France to Russia. In Russia, the French choreographer Marius Petipa collaborated with the Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky to create the lavish story ballet spectacles such as *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. Today, these ballets still form the basis of the classical ballet repertoire of companies all over the world.

One Act Ballets

In 1909, the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev brought together a group of dancers, choreographers, composers, artists and designers for his company, the Ballets Russes. This company took Paris by storm, introducing short, one act ballets such as *Schéhrazade*, *Les Sylphides*, *The Rite of Spring*, *Firebird* and *Petrouchka*. Some of the world's greatest dancers, including Anna Pavlova (1881– 1931), Vasslav Nijinsky (1889–1950) and choreographers Mikhail Fokine (1880–1942) and George Balanchine (1904–1983) were part of Diaghilev's company.

Establishing Dance in North America

Almost all contemporary ballet companies and dancers are influenced by Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. The first visit by this company to North America in 1916–1917 stimulated great interest

in ballet. Dancers from the Ballets Russes were instrumental in furthering this new interest in ballet. For example, dancer George Balanchine went to the United States and founded the New York City Ballet (originally called the American Ballet). He became renowned for perfecting the abstract ballet and for establishing neo-classicism through his choreographic masterpieces such as *Serenade*, *Agon* and *Concerto Barocco*. Ninette de Valois and Marie Rambert also went on to found, respectively, England's Royal Ballet and the Rambert Dance Company.

BASIC BALLET POSITIONS

Source: *Connexions*® <http://cnx.org> by Alex Volschenk

Every new step you will learn will make use of the basic positions. All dancers, even the greatest, use exactly these positions every day.

Positions of the Feet

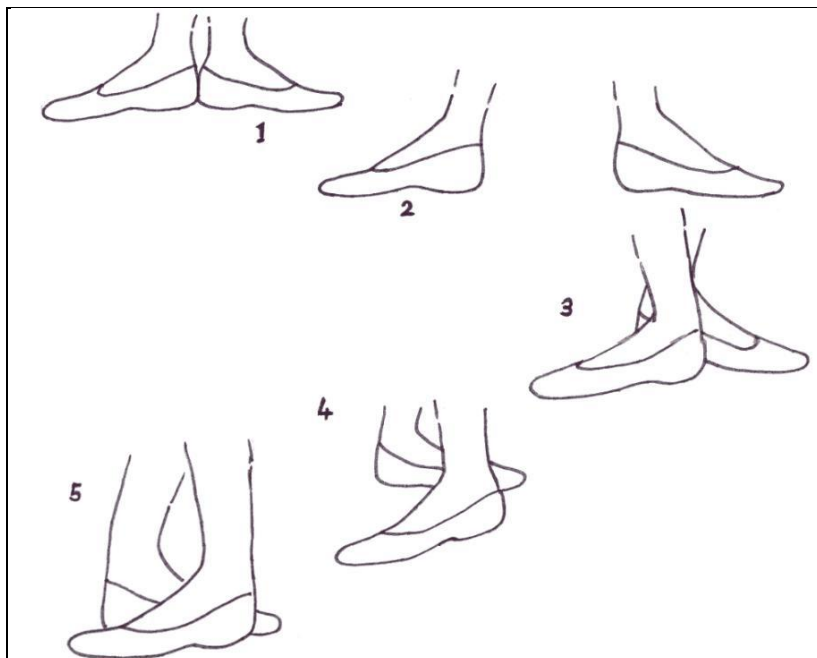
FIRST POSITION: turn your feet out to the side with your heels touching – turn your whole leg out at the hip, not just the foot.

SECOND POSITION: turn your toes out on the same line as first position – stand with feet apart – the space between your heels should be about the length of one of your feet – place the whole of both feet on the floor – don't roll forwards and put too much weight on your big toes.

THIRD POSITION: cross one foot halfway in front of the other – your weight should be balanced evenly on both feet.

FOURTH POSITION: place one foot exactly in front of the other with some space between them.

FIFTH POSITION: your feet should be turned out, fully crossed and touching each other firmly.



BALLET TERMS

<p>Adage: In ballet, a slow section of a pas de deux or an exercise in a dance class focusing on slow controlled movements that highlight balance and extension, and require strength and poise.</p>
<p>Adagio: The part of a dance class where exercises for balance and sustained movement are performed; a musical composition performed at a slow tempo.</p>
<p>Alignment: Creating harmony with the body so that unbroken lines are formed with the arms and legs without displacement of the torso.</p>
<p>Arabesque: In ballet, a pose held on one leg with the other leg and both arms extended away and up from the centre of the body; also, positioning of the arms in relation to the legs. As with positions of the feet, each position is distinguished by a number, such as first, second and third arabesque.</p>
<p>Barre: A horizontal pole, either attached to the wall or freestanding, to support dancers while stretching, warming up or doing exercises "at the barre". Barre exercises like pliés, battements and ronds de jambe form the first part of a traditional ballet class and are the basis for all technique.</p>
<p>Battement: In ballet, the "beating" of either a stretched or flexed leg. The types are : a battement tendu, a battement dégagé, a battement fondu, a petit battement et a grand battement.</p>
<p>Corps de ballet: In ballet, performers who do not have lead roles and perform during group scenes or action. In narrative ballets, members of the corps de ballet will perform roles such as peasants, wedding guests and swans.</p>
<p>Enchaînement: A "chain" or linked sequence of movements.</p>
<p>Turnout: A way of standing and using the legs that is initiated in the pelvis, where both sides of the body rotate outwards from the hips, away from the spine.</p>
<p>Pas de deux: In ballet, a sequence or dance for two dancers.</p>
<p>Pirouette: In ballet, a spin or turn of the body performed on one leg. Pirouettes may be performed en dehors (turning away from the supporting leg) or en dedans (turning toward the supporting leg).</p>
<p>Plié: In ballet, a bending of the knees. This can be done either in demi-plié ("half-plié"), where the heels remain on the floor, or in grand plié (large or full plié), where, except in second position of the feet, the heels leave the floor at the deepest point of the bend.</p>
<p>Port de bras: In ballet, arm movements around the body.</p>
<p>Rond de jambe: In ballet, a movement that goes "round the leg". A rond de jambe may be performed in two ways: À terre ("on the ground"), where the pointed toe of a stretched working leg traces a circular pattern en dehors (from the front of the body to the back), or en dedans (from back to front), passing each time through first position of the feet. En l'air ("in the air"), either petit, with the working leg raised just a few centimeters from the ground, or grand, where it is raised to 90°. A rond de jambe en l'air may also be performed as an isolated movement with the working leg raised à la seconde (to the side) and the knee bending and straightening as the toe describes quick circular patterns in the air without moving the thigh.</p>

INTERNET RESOURCES

Royal Winnipeg Ballet www.rwb.org/wonderland
National Arts Centre www.nac-cna.ca

DANCE AND ARTS EDUCATION WEBSITES

ArtsAlive, the NAC's performing arts education site www.artsalive.ca
Council of Drama and Dance in Education (Ontario) www.code.on.ca
Kennedy Centre (USA) www.artsedge.kennedy-centre.org
Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance www.cahperd.ca

OTHER CANADIAN BALLET COMPANIES

The National Ballet of Canada www.national.ballet.ca
Les Grands Ballet Canadiens www.grandsballet.scom
Ballet British Columbia (Ballet BC) www.balletbc.com
Alberta Ballet www.albertaballet.com
Ballet Jorgen www.balletjorgen.ca

BALLET RESOURCES

ABT - American Ballet Theatre Library: Ballet Dictionary and Repertory Archive, USA
www.abt.org/education/library.asp

American Ballet Theatre's Ballet Dictionary
www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html

Ballet.co, UK
www.ballet.co.uk

CBC.ca: "Into a fantasy world: A history of ballet"
A brief history of the deceptively simple but evocative dance form.
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/ballet/>

History of dance from prehistory to 18th century ballet (in French), France and Belgium
www.ladanse.net

Chorème www.choreme.ca

ONLINE DANCE PUBLICATIONS

Dance Collection Danse www.dcd.ca
The Dance Current www.thedancecurrent.com
Dance International Magazine www.danceinternational.org
Dance Magazine www.dancemagazine.com

We'd love to hear from you! Please send completed assignments to:

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The National Youth and Education Trust is supported by Founding Partner TELUS, Sun Life Financial, Michael Potter, supporters and patrons of the annual NAC Gala and the donors of the NAC Foundation's Corporate Club and Donor's Circle.



APPENDICES

Winnipeg Free Press, Dance Review by Allison Mayes, March 11, 2011

Curiouser, indeed

Wonderland's digital dazzle dwarfs the Dancers



The lush, mysterious forest that appears at the start of *Wonderland* has to be one of the most stunning visions ever presented on a ballet stage. The Centennial Concert Hall audience at Wednesday's world première by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet gasped in awe as the entire stage space was filled by a gigantic image that seemed three-dimensional, projected on white panels at various depths.

As the White Rabbit (Yosuke Mino), a clown-like fellow in whiteface, skittered past the curious Alice (Jacelyn Lobay), one felt the intoxicating promise of Shawn Hounsell's contemporary spin on Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice in Wonderland*.

Sadly, that moment is never equalled in the frenetic, ultimately empty spectacle. The ballet, which runs two and a half hours including intermission, earned only a partial standing ovation at night's end -- a sign in quick-to-its-feet Winnipeg that many patrons were less than transported. *Wonderland* is the most technologically complex work RWB has ever staged. The company spent \$500,000 to let the Montreal-based Hounsell, a former RWB dancer who has choreographed successful shorter works, stretch out in his first full-length fantasy. He brought in Jimmy Lakatos to design the "video-scenography" and Nicolas Bernier to do sound effects. What seems to have gotten lost is that ballet-goers want communication through dance. The overblown digital dazzle -- visual and aural -- hijacks the production. It overwhelms the choreography -- a fast-paced mix of classical and modern movement -- dwarfs the 26-dancer company and has a profound distancing effect. You know something's wrong when your mind wanders to the computer that's running the show. While some of the video projections -- like those that make Alice grow and shrink -- are effective, there's no character here to engage with or care about. We're reduced to being superficially entertained by cheap laughs and quirk for quirk's sake (the kooky band of Tooney Loons being prime offenders). There are pacing problems, with sections going on too long and Alice-as-observer doing too much running and looking bewildered. Over and over -- for instance, when the Mad Hatter (Alexander Gamayunov) appears -- we think we're in for thrilling choreography, but it doesn't materialize.

Dance review

The story wanders, but 'Wonderland' looks wonderful

PAULA CITRON

WINNIPEG — From Thursday's Globe and Mail

Published Wednesday, Mar. 09, 2011 4:30PM EST

Last updated Thursday, Mar. 10, 2011 4:56PM EST

Wonderland

- The Royal Winnipeg Ballet
- At Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg on Wednesday

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has long been a lure for choreographers. It may be a children's classic, but there are enough adult elements in the story to intrigue any dancesmith.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's new production of *Wonderland*, however, is both ambitious and flawed — the work is a technical triumph, but it falters in content. Montreal-based choreographer Shawn Hounsell has approached *Alice* from two sides. On one, the book's favourite characters are given their rightful place on the stage, which provides both whimsy and humour. (There are also a couple of surprise cameo appearances.)

On the darker side, Hounsell has made Alice (Jacelyn Lobay) an older woman who is looking back through the rabbit hole at her dreamlike journey. That fantasy allows her to escape the mundane, but at the end of a second visit comes the reality check: Alice, and humankind in general, cannot escape into fantasy forever.

Hounsell's problem is that, while he has fashioned Carroll's famous characters with some skill, he has not really been able to portray the more serious parts of his vision. There is rather a disjointed quality to the choreography, and the voiceover text, while helpful, does not completely fill in the gaps.

Alice's serious reflective moments, crucial to his interpretation, seem attached to the fantasy like interlopers. As well, in an effort to give the RWB dancers some meaty choreography, both on point and off, these showy moments seem to halt the action rather than carry the story along. They appear in isolation as dance for dance's sake.

For example, a group of seven dancers called the Tooney Loons, who seem to be amorphous denizens of Wonderland, perform a few ensemble numbers that seem unrelated to the rest. The Gryphon and Mock Turtle, portrayed inexplicably by three people (Jo-Ann Sundermeier, Amar Dhaliwal and Dmitri Dvogolets) execute a series of duets, trios and, finally, a quartet with Alice that are pure classical ballet. Attractive yes; meaningful no.

Hounsell is on surer ground with some of the well-known characters. The always wonderful Yosuke Mino is a wired, neurotic White Rabbit whose movements are a blend of both animal imagery and Bay St.

corporate businessman. He is the through line as Alice's guide. Tweedledee and Tweedledum (Tristan Dobrowney and Thiago Dos Santos) are given cute mirror-image movements.

Beloved ballerina Tara Birtwhistle, looking like a 1980s Lady Gaga with platinum hair, bright red bell bottoms and an Elizabethan collar, is a harridan of a Queen of Hearts. Using her megaphone, she shouts a stream of insults and orders, and of course her trademark "Off with their heads!" In my favourite line, she chastises the orchestra for playing too many notes.

If the story is a bit obscure, the optics are simply wonderful. Guillaume Lord's set is made up of sliding and flying panels that are used for Jimmy Lakotos's remarkable video projections, a compendium of human and abstract figures. Whether the gorgeous sylvan forest that begins the piece, or the lush gardens of the second act, the various backdrops present a startling parade.

Signs flash instructions. For example, a picture of a medicinal bottle and the words "Drink Me" result in the image of a rapidly shrinking Alice. It really is quite breathtaking how her body just dissolves downward. Kudos also to lighting designer Hugh Conacher, who brings clarity to the dance. Anne Armit's costumes, a vivid array of beachwear gone wild, are a real treat. Not so great, however, are the applause signs to cue the audience.

For his music, Hounsell has used selections from the works of Canadian composers John Estacio and Brian Current, both modernist and atmospheric. The music, however, is a tad too evocative over time, and it is a relief when the 19th-century waltzes of Josef Strauss kick in for the Queen of Heart's scene to give some needed oompah-pah. The Winnipeg Symphony is ably conducted by Tadeusz Biernacki.

Hounsell makes the company look good, and his creative team has made the stage look good. Even if the subtext has been pushed under the radar, *Wonderland* is not without its charms.

Wonderland continues at Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall until March 13. The company tours Wonderland to eight western cities, March 16 to April 1, and to Ottawa's National Arts Centre, April 28 to 30.

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