

VERONICA TENNANT, C.C. Contribution to DANCE in CANADA 1964-2018

During her illustrious career as Principal Dancer with The National Ballet of Canada, Veronica Tennant won a devoted following on the national and international stage as a dancer of versatility and dramatic power. At 18, the youngest Principal Dancer in the company Tennant was chosen by Celia Franca and John Cranko, for her debut as *Juliet*. She went on to earn accolades in every major classical role as well as having several contemporary ballets choreographed on her. She was chosen by, and worked with the legendary choreographers: Sir Frederick Ashton, Roland Petit, Erik Bruhn, John Neumeier and Jiri Kylian – and she in turn nurtured a younger generation of Canadian choreographers including James Kukelka, Anne Ditchburn, Constantin Patsalas and David Allan. For 25 years she danced across North and South America, Europe and Japan, dancing with the greatest male dancers of our time including; Erik Bruhn, Rudolf Nureyev, Anthony Dowell, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Edward Villella, Fleming Flindt, Peter Schaufuss, Niels Kehlet, Fernando Bujones, Ivan Nagy, Jean Pierre Bonnefous and Richard Cragun. She was blessed with her Canadian partners, from Earl Kraul (her first Romeo), to Lawrence Adams, Glenn Gilmour, Frank Augustyn, Sergiu Stefanschi, Kevin Pugh, Rex Harrington and Raymond Smith (her tenth Romeo).

Two of the CBC television performances with Tennant in the title role; *Cinderella* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, won Emmy Awards. Her first, in Norman Campbell's 1965 production of *Romeo and Juliet* won Le Prix Barthelmy in Monte Carlo. Veronica Tennant gave her farewell performances in 1989 – dancing her signature role in, *Romeo and Juliet* and in the Gala – *A Passion For Dance – Celebrating the Tennant Magic*.

Veronica Tennant overlapped immediately onto television in 1989, as the original host/creative consultant/writer of *Sunday Arts Entertainment* on CBC Television for three seasons. Her first CBC Television venture as auteur/producer/ writer was *Salute to Dancers For Life*, shown December 1st, World AIDS Day, with *Danser Pour La Vie*, telecast in French on SRC. The programs featured the leading lights of Canadian Dance including: Andrea Boardman, Louise Lecavalier, Robert Desrosiers, Margie Gillis, Danny Grossman, Evelyn Hart, Rex Harrington and Karen Kain. Tennant joined the Shaw Festival Theatre Company in the 1992 season, performing the acting and dancing lead in *On the Town*, choreography by Claudia Moore, music by Leonard Bernstein and directed by Susan Cox. In 1995 Veronica Tennant shared the title role with Nicholas Pennell in the Rhombus Media film, *Satie and Suzanne*, directed by Tim Southam and choreographed by Cirque du Soleil's Debra Brown, which garnered her a Gemini Nomination for Best Performance in a performing arts program. And in 1997 she performed the title role as actor/dancer, with Timothy Findley in his "literary vaudeville" show directed by Paul Thompson, *Piano Man's Daughter and Others* in 22 cities across Canada, commissioning two dance sequences from David Earle and Danny Grossman.

Expanding her horizons behind the camera, Tennant made it her mission to make Dance more accessible, targeting significantly wider audiences. With Joan Tosoni directing, she produced and wrote for CBC; *Margie Gillis: Wild Hearts in Strange Times*, with guest artist Jesse Norman, to excellent reviews, 3 Gemini Nominations and Gemini Award for Best Performance for Margie Gillis. Importantly - this show received the largest broadcast audience of any Performing Arts Program on Canadian television in 1997, winning the Chrysler's Peoples' Choice, and was chosen to screen at Lincoln Center in N.Y. for *Dancing for the Camera*. Tennant was accorded the prestigious International Emmy Award in 1999, for producing, writing and co-directing *Karen Kain: Dancing in the Moment*; a triumphant performance celebration of Kain's magnificent 28 year career climaxing with works shot especially for television and freshly created pieces. Guest artists were, Ben Heppner, Rex Harrington, Martha Henry, Rod Davies, and Laurent Hilaire, with newly discovered footage of Kain and Rudolf Nureyev in *Swan Lake* from 1972.

Forming Veronica Tennant Productions in 1997, Tennant as independent producer and emerging director, shot the mini-doc. *Courage ...* on Mavis Staines for the Toronto Arts Awards, directed and choreographed *Song of Songs* with Jaime Tapper and John Persson, and commissioned *Words Fail* with Peggy Baker and Shauna Rolston bringing these artists together for the first time. At the Banff Centre in 2001, Tennant choreographed and directed a short film, *TRIO* for Ronda Nychka, John Ottmann and Michel Faigaux with a Beethoven sonata played by Tom, Isobel and Shauna Rolston which won a Gemini Award for Best Cinematography. It was telecast on CBC's Opening Night along with *The Dancers' Story ~ National Ballet at 50*. This significant dance-film was a living history told by National Ballet dancers brought back to the barre - decade by decade; (and for many charter members after 50 years - for the last time). The roster of people who made The National Ballet of Canada is the stuff of legends; Celia Franca, Lois Smith, Grant Strate, Brian Macdonald, Robert Ito, Veronica Tennant, Karen Kain, Frank Augustyn, Kevin Pugh, Rex Harrington, and so many more. The performance pieces,

filmed on 35mm, were danced by leading lights of the National Ballet: Aleksandar Antonijevic, Guillaume Côté, Martine Lamy, Etienne Lavigne, Rex Harrington, Greta Hodgkinson, Chan Hon Goh, Heather Ogden, Sonia Rodriguez and Xiao Nan Yu.

A Pairing of SwanS, produced and directed by Veronica, was also telecast on CBC's Opening Night. Shot on super 16mm film at the Winter Garden Theatre in Toronto it was a poetic homage to the two consummate Canadian artists, Evelyn Hart and Rex Harrington, then at the summit of their careers. They were musically joined onstage respectively by the renowned cellists, Shauna Rolston and Amanda Forsyth, as well as Canada's celebrated harpist Judy Loman, in two exquisite music compositions: *The Swan* by Camille Saint-Saëns, and *The Swan Sees His Reflection* by Canadian composer, Malcolm Forsyth with choreography commissioned from Matjash Mrozewski. Brent Carver took the role of the poet and spoke the words of Anna Pavlova at the start of the film.

Northern Light: Visions and Dreams was a special film project conceived by Veronica, and shot in Iqaluit, Winnipeg and Toronto – depicting the celebration of LIGHT in both the Inuit and European renaissance cultures. A particularly evocative sequence was with Sarah Laakkuluk Williamson performing a centuries-old Greenlandic Mask Dance. Also appearing on the CBC Television program were: Aqsarniit: Sylvia Cloutier and Madeleine Allakariallak - Margie Gillis, Robert Glumbek, Ronda Nychka, Laura Pudwell and Meredith Hall - Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak, Mathew Nuqingaq and young dancers of Canada's National Ballet School in original choreography by Dominique Dumais.

In a highlight meshing of the two-facets of her careers, Veronica Tennant directed/produced/wrote and narrated *CELIA FRANCA ~ Tour de Force* - A 50 minute profile of Celia Franca, the visionary Founder, the indomitable Director, of The National Ballet of Canada. Celia Franca was Veronica's first ballet examiner at age ten, the Artistic Director who cast her to dance Juliet at 18. The film also beautifully chronicled the Grand Opening of the Celia Franca Centre at Canada's National Ballet School, with an illuminating recounting in the body of the film, of what battles were fought in the pioneer years, bringing our Canadian legacies to continuing fruition – with the Company and the School now celebrated internationally in the highest rank. An accompanying Special Features DVD contains a wealth of interviews and extra filmed material with Alexander Grant, Leo Kersley, Lorna Geddes, and David Adams.

Veronica's extensive list of auteur films for screen, highlights collaborations with Michael Ondaatje for the multi-award winning *Shadow Pleasures*, featuring Margie Gillis, Robert Glumbek, Roberto Campanella, Andrea Nann, Gail Skrela, Sean Ling, Mary Paterson and Caroline Richardson. Another prize-winning production was *VIDA Y DANZA, CUBA* - broadcast nationally both in Canada and Cuba celebrating the visionary Liza Alfonso and her company and school. Extra note: Liza Alfonso won the Dora Award for choreography of *VIDA* in 2008, has been honoured by Michelle Obama at the White House and has been named one of the top 100 Women of artistic influence by the BBC (2018).

In 2012, Veronica created *Something's Coming* a BravoFACT short film - born of the collective creative genius of *West Side Story* with two singularly gifted Canadian artists - Guillaume Côté premier dancer National Ballet of Canada, and Paul Nolan star of Stratford Festival. For Canada's Walk of Fame, Veronica has made several mini-films - with her two dance contributions on Rex Harrington and Sonia Rodriguez. Committed passionately to the wellbeing of her fellow artists, Tennant has produced/directed numerous successful fund-raising galas with an elite roster of performers over the years - benefitting the Dancer Transition Centre, and - seven years in a row for the Artists' Health Centre at the Toronto Western Hospital.

Veronica Tennant has served as Canada's National Ambassador for UNICEF since 1992, and has been awarded five honorary doctorates. She was elevated in 2003 from Officer, to Companion of the Order of Canada - the Order's highest honour. Just recently, Veronica was inducted into the first, *Encore! Dance Hall of Fame* presented by Dance Collection Danse. Her most recent production, *CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER ~ A Memoir*, a film portrait of the distinguished actor, celebrated its world premiere at the Winter Garden Theatre in Toronto, November 19th 2018 and at Hot Docs, May 16, 2019. *Karen Kain: Dancing in the Moment* was screened at Hot Docs, September 18, 2019 in celebration of Karen Kain's 50 years with the National Ballet – followed by a Conversation Q&A with Karen and Veronica – Writer, Producer and Co-Director of the International Emmy Award-winning film.

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