

Ballet Creole

the quintessential
leader of African and
Caribbean Dance

by A. Griffith

Founded in 1990 as a vehicle for performing artists, dancers, and musicians to practice their craft, Ballet Creole opened the door to a new era in Canadian dance history. Ballet Creole's roots and momentum lie in the transformation of cultural and traditional Canadian dance. Drawing from multi-cultural aesthetics, the company produces cutting edge works rooted in African and Caribbean dance and music. Under the direction of Founder and Artistic Director Patrick Parson, Ballet Creole strives to live up to their vision of being the forerunner of African and Caribbean dance within the Canadian performing arts arena.

Trinidadian-born Parson is a gifted and versatile artist who studied ballet and modern dance at the Caribbean School of Dance and the Dance Academy of Trinidad and Tobago and was trained in the dance and drumming styles of Guinea and Senegal by Senegalese Mor Thiam, Artistic Director of Les Ballets Africains. Parson is a certified teacher of the Dunham Technique and holds a Masters Degree in Dance Ethnology from York University (Toronto), where he is also a professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Kinesiology. In addition, he teaches at Humber College and has previously taught at the University of Toronto and Ryerson University. Artistic development is also important to Parson; he regularly attends workshops and conferences across North America.





Parson attributes his passion for dancing and performing to his family. "I come from a performing family. My mother was a dance teacher and both my grandmothers were members of a singing and dancing troupe that performed throughout the neighbouring towns in my native Trinidad. I started dancing and playing percussions with the troupe at an early age."

Parson's passion to dance and perform was the driving force behind the creation of Ballet Creole. "I came to Canada to study dance, because I wanted to make my life as a dancer." But while studying in Canada, he soon realized that the medium for the dances in the format he was trained in was missing. So Parson approached the board of directors of the company he was dancing with to incorporate these styles. However for a number of reasons his efforts did not meet with success, but this did not

deter him. Ballet Creole is the fruit of his tireless dedication and strong desire to see dances with African and Caribbean influences performed. "I created Ballet Creole so that I can dance."

Performing to diverse audiences nationally and across North America, Ballet Creole delivers stellar performances that showcase their artistic expertise. "Our approach to dance is to enjoy what we do", says Parson. The company's style is a reflection of many different dance forms and techniques such as classical ballet, African, Caribbean, classical Indian, Irish, popular dance, jazz and hip hop.

These forms were evident in the company's latest choreographed works - *Glorious Soulful Messiah*. The production was a masterful compilation of classical ballet, tap, jazz, African, Caribbean and street

dance. Inspired by the timeless music of Handel's *Messiah*, reinterpreted in a modern vein, *Glorious Soulful Messiah* was a brilliantly expressive and imaginative ensemble of great classics and modern dance. The dancers' gestures and body language evoked strong emotions and every movement carried with it a message. The blending of sensual African and Caribbean dance with superb classical training stunned the audience proving why Ballet Creole is the quintessential leader of African and Caribbean Dance.



Conversations with two Principal Dancers and three dancers who are students of Ballet Creole's Professional Training Program illustrate the unique opportunities the company presents to each dancer.

Kevin Ormsby, the Assistant Artistic Director and a Principal Dancer of Ballet Creole has been dancing for fourteen years with the company. He started his career in Jamaica over twenty years ago, where he was the recipient of a scholarship to the Edna Manley Performing Arts School and the recipient of several awards from the Jamaican Cultural Commission. Ormsby performed with numerous dance companies including the internationally renowned Garth Fagan Dance Company in New York, where he toured extensively in the United States, Canada, and Europe. He holds a Degree in Mass Communications and Political Science from York University. "Dance for me is

humanistic; it is the truest human form of expression." Ormsby believes the way to bring modern dance to the community is through accessibility, and sees Ballet Creole as a platform for ethnic dancers. His vision for Ballet Creole is for it to become the preeminent dance company in Canada for African and Caribbean dance, generating future leaders and visionaries in Contemporary Dance.

Neketia Perez is another Principal dancer at Ballet Creole and was also Parson's assistant for many years. She started her dance career in Trinidad and Tobago where she was a student at the Carol LaChapel School of Dance. She later moved to Calgary, Alberta and worked with various dance companies there. She auditioned for Ballet Creole in 1999, and has been dancing with the company ever since. She has choreographed for the company and currently teaches African and Hip Hop movements. She has a role in the soon to be released musical "When Moses Woke" which was also featured on Bravo! She hopes to pursue a Masters Program in Dance or Education.

Cuban-born *Yuhala Mwy Garcia* is a student of the Ballet Creole Professional Training Program. She started dancing at the age of 5 and was recognized for her talents and gained admittance into the National School of Arts in Cuba. Garcia auditioned for Ballet Creole after learning about it through the National School program. "This is my second year with Ballet Creole and it has been an amazing new experience for me. I am learning new techniques and enjoy performing the different dances." Yuhala hopes that all her ballet training from both the National School of Dance in Cuba and from Ballet Creole will gain her entrance into *Cirque Du Soleil*.

Ingrid Diaz-Cespedes also comes

from Cuba, where she too studied at the National School of Arts in Cuba and is currently a student of the Ballet Creole Professional Training Program. She has been a professional dancer for 18 years and holds a degree in Contemporary Modern Cuban dance. "I am pleased to be dancing with Ballet Creole, its dance styles and techniques are unique." She would like to pursue her Masters Degree and teach some of the techniques learned at Ballet Creole at an advanced level.

Mafa Makhubalo a South African native, has been dancing since his time in the womb according to his mother. He started Latin and ballroom dancing at age 7 and at the age of 14 he joined a youth group for classical dance. He was accepted into the

South African Dance Institute in 1999 and began dancing in commercial productions for hotels and casinos in order to support his classical training. He auditioned for Ballet Creole three years ago, he is a student of its Professional Training Program, and has danced in many of its productions. He hopes to mix his Business Administration background with his dance background to create a business venture where he can bring ethnic dancing to theatres.

"When I go out in the audience on any performance night and see familiar faces that have come back to see our performances, then I know we are doing our jobs."

- Patrick Parson

Dance Ontario's Dance Weekend '07

Toronto's greatest join the city's newest dance companies – from ballet and Bharatynatam, jazz, hip-hop and flamenco, to African, modern, Latin, rhythm tap, and Chinese folk... two days of dance at its most thrilling and memorable.

January 13–14, 2007,
1–7 pm

Harbourfront Centre
For up to date info,
please visit

www.danceontario.ca

