

PORTRAIT



D.A. HOSKINS
TORONTO

DOSSIER DE PRESSE / PRESS KIT

31 MAI, 1 ET 2 JUIN 2010

THE DIETRICH GROUP

Grounded in dynamic and intimate physicality, The Dietrich Group challenges people's perceptions of the interplay of mediums in live performance, bringing 'modern' dance in Canada into the realm of contemporary art.

Launched in January 2008 under the artistic directorship of visual artist/choreographer D.A. Hoskins The Dietrich Group facilitates interactive exchanges in art. The company's goal is to create a hybrid of 'sensory expressionism' in the performing arts and ultimately to engage in a vital theatrical exchange.

"I initiated The Dietrich Group in January 2008 with dance artists Danielle Baskerville and Brendan Wyatt as a desire to expand the expressive potential of dance by means of collaborative exchange and open dialogue with artists of different mediums. The Dietrich Group has since created three full-evening multidisciplinary dance works and is establishing a core of diverse artists to facilitate connection, growth and continuity. It is becoming a 'home base' for experimental artists to be engaged in a contemporary art undertaking - one that draws from different artistic disciplines while maintaining a focus on the strength and power of dance in theatre. The Dietrich Group also aims to focus on the individuality of each artist's voice within the collaborative whole. With this philosophy, each position and each player is of equal importance. Named after the screen goddess Mariene Dietrich, this association represents the character and strength of the individual that lies at the forefront of The Dietrich Groups' collaborations."

D.A. Hoskins

Collaborators :

D.A. Hoskins, Danielle Baskerville, Brendan Wyatt, Brian Soloman, Brodie Stevenson, Byron Fast, Deirdre Fulton, Gilles Goyette, Jill Battson, Linnea Swan, Mark Aikman, Mike Moore, Michael Watts, Nico Stagias, Rebecca Picherack, Robert Kingsbury, Santosh Isaac, Shaun Brodie, Simon Rossiter, Tyler Gledhill, Valerie Calam

Selected Works :

2009 : *Portrait*
2009 : *Paris1994\Gallery*
2008 : *Lady*

D.A. HOSKINS



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D.A. Hoskins is a freelance choreographer and visual artist based in Toronto. Over the past fifteen years he has established himself as both a recognized dancer and choreographer. Professional dance experiences include work with the National Folk Dance Ensemble, Atlas Moves Watching, Canadian Opera Company, Toronto Dance Theatre, Dancetheatre David Earle as well as host of independent creators.

D.A. Hoskins was the recipient of the 2004 Clifford E. Lee Award for distinction in choreography from the Banff Centre for the Arts and became the first choreographer outside of the United States to be asked to participate in Hubbard Street 2's choreographic residence in Chicago.

He has created over forty choreographic works including commissions from the Elora Music Festival, Pendrecki String Quartet, Kitchener Waterloo Symphony, the Open Ears Festival and Via Salzburg Chamber Orchestra. His work has been presented at the Art Gallery of Ontario as part of an evening examining Sexuality and Censorship, and a retrospective on artist Barbara Hepworth. An excerpt from his full evening work *The Mortality Songs* was presented at a Holocaust Perspective at the Toronto Jewish Community Centre. This work was later to be presented in its entirety as a fundraiser for the Toronto People with Aids Foundation.

D.A. Hoskins has also created work for the School of Toronto Dance Theatre, Ryerson University, and L'École de danse de Québec and most recently for the Royal Conservatory's Opera Ensemble in which he choreographed Ravel's opera *L'enfant et les Sortilèges* and Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with theatre director Jennifer Tarver.

Collaborations have made a huge impact on the direction and evolution of his exercise in dance making. Toronto composer Gilles Goyette's soundpaintings have been commissioned for six of Mr. Hoskins' works – including *Althea Frutex*, *FATHERWHOART*, *The Arms of Morpheous* and *China*. Film work with independent filmmaker Nico Stagias and the development of multidisciplinary theatre works with spoken word artist and poet Jill Battson have resulted in the development of intriguing and fruitful collaborative works.

Artistic statement

"I have always had an interest in the visual arts – dance offers me the possibility to create landscapes in which I am able to express diversity and

interaction with other artists. I see myself as a visual artist who directs within the dance idiom.

I have consciously created tasks within my work to further the depth and expressive potential of my creations. This has included the infusion of dance and theatre through vocalization, text, visual projections and the creation of physical settings. The inspiration for this comes from the languages of conceptual art, new media, and music videos.

What continues to be integral within my work is that it offers a personal perspective. I have become more conscious of the artists with whom I work. Their individual characters have come the for-front of my creations. How they filter and comment on the physical play is the integral force in creating work that has immediacy and vibrancy. It is this focus that gives my work its uniqueness.”

D.A. Hoskins

D.A. HOSKINS INTERVIEW

Interview by Chris Dupuis, Toronto-based artist and writer, January 2009

I understand that the project has evolved fairly substantially from its inception to what it now is. Can you talk about where you started, where you ended up, and how you got there?

Initially the piece was to be an investigation of the individual personalities of the two dancers (Danielle Baskerville and Robert Kingsbury). I brought Nico Stagias (Video Artist) and Gilles Goyette (Composer) as collaborators to the process intending to explore them in the same way. That whole idea just basically died. We started in that direction and I found it wasn't working to my liking. It was all sitting in a place that was too directed, too specific, and too heavy handed. At the same time, the perspective was very vague, which is something I find typical of Contemporary Dance and something that I try to avoid in my own work. I find a lot of choreographers create work that's very open ended and they want to leave things up to the audience to interpret. This work eludes to a certain intellectualism that I feel like just isn't there. To me the idiom has to be very personal in order to reach people. This piece has reached a point where it's still heavy in the subject matter, but I also feel like there's a great clarity to it as well and a specific point of view. Essentially it's a self portrait of me.

The idea of self portrait is something that artists often explore at the very start of their practice. I'm curious to know how and why at this point in your career you've decided to take that on.

The self portrait element has always been an integral part of my work. I have always used the idiom as a way to search for meaning for me. In some ways I'm still a young Roman Catholic boy and my work is often liturgical in a manner. It has a lot of symbolism that ends up being reiterated to me as a means of reeducating myself.

The way that you talk about contemporary dance hints that you feel like you're working outside the form.

I've become very discouraged in the idiom. When I first stepped into dance as a young gay guy I saw a dance show that had a play and sensuality to it that was the true opposite of my personal history and how I grew up. But then when I was studying it I started to feel like the entire education in the arts was about conformity. In that way I've been very discouraged by the idiom. I feel like it's pretty repressed.

Do you think that's contemporary dance in Toronto or do you feel like that's contemporary dance in the world?

I think unfortunately Toronto is a bit behind the times and lives in that sort of Sally Anne School of Dance world. I feel like my generation of artists is kind of stuck. I look at companies with great spaces, lots of rehearsal time, and huge budgets and I feel like the work they're producing is just unacceptable.

Are there any artists in Toronto who you think are doing interesting work?

I think Sasha Ivonochko is really interesting. I think Kate Alton is extremely interesting. Claudia Moore too.

What about artists outside Toronto?

I really like Deborah Dunn. David Ferguson is doing great things as well. A large majority of the work I see alludes to being what it's not. It acts like it has content but it doesn't.

What would you like to see happen to dance in Toronto?

I'd like to see a renaissance in the arts. The reason I started the Dietrich Group is because I wanted to interact with other artists and have an ongoing exchange. The dancers are included in the work and have as much of a voice as I do.

Can you talk a bit about the Dietrich Group and what you do?

The Dietrich Group is a collective that I started around the idea of bringing artists together to create interdisciplinary works. We feed off each other. Eventually I'm hoping that the dancers involved in the work will start taking on other positions in the process. I'm hoping it will be an ever evolving entity with new people coming in all the time.

In my research about you I noticed that you're always referred to as "choreographer and visual artist" as opposed to just "choreographer". Can you tell me a bit about your practice as a visual artist?

I self proclaim myself as a visual artist as a response to being in the dance idiom. With the way people assess and talk about visual art there's a serious critical discussion about the work that I feel is absent from dance. Even the people who are supposed to be critics don't take a very critical approach to the work.

□ I want to come back to this in a moment but let's take a sidetrack for a bit. When I started Time and Space part of the objective was to address the lack of critical writing about the performing arts. We talk about critics all the time, but we don't really have critics. We have reviewers, which is not the same thing.

Last year when we did Art Fag at Buddies, there was a critic who wrote a piece about me where I was referred to the "grumpy old man of modern dance". I find that kind of label really frustrating. I'm certainly vocal about the state of my medium. I question the choices that people are making and why certain work is getting funding that I feel is undeserving, but to call me that just sort of discounts everything I'm saying. When we sent out the original press releases for Portrait, we invited all the critics to write previews, but said we didn't want reviews. Eventually we caved and now all the critics coming. Someone said to me that it's my responsibility to be part of the arena and to have my work judged and written about like everyone else.

I didn't train as a journalist and I worked for a number of years as a professional artist before I started to do arts writing. I was really surprised when I got into the business to find the lack of responsibility that arts journalists are trained and encouraged to feel towards the people they are writing about. The artist isn't paying you. The editor is paying you. I straddle both worlds so I'm starting to get it more, but there's something that still feels so backward about that to me. I've had many occasions where I've been frustrated by editors pulling things from stories

I've written about the artist's process and things that have been cut from the work because they feel like the public just wants to know what the work looks like.

I think it's a Canadian disease. When you go down to New York the way the work is talked about is so much more informative. How are we going to grow if we don't start educating people on a broader level?

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REVUE DE PRESSE / PRESS REVIEW

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ÉCHOS DE LA PRESSE / PRESS ECHOS

“D.A. Hoskins combines intellectual rigour with emotional wallop, resulting in Works that engage hearts and minds“

Toronto Life Magazine

“A choreographer of lucid imagination and sensitivity“

Bob Clark, *The Calgary Herald*

“One of the leading Bright lights of Canadian contemporary choreographers“

The Globe and Mail

“The approach was immediate and relevant, adjectives you don’t normally apply to contemporary dance“

Glenn Sumi, *Now Magazine*, May 2002

About *Portrait*

“... a delicious dichotomy continues throughout the work reminding us that there is as much struggle as joy in artistic creation.”

Paula Citron, *The Globe and Mail*, January 2009

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

January 10th, 2009

By Paula Citron

What makes D.A.Hoskins such a fascinating choreographer is that his shows impact on many levels. His latest work, *Portrait*, examines the impulse to create, according to his program notes. But if one didn't read the program beforehand, the work would seem to be about something else entirely.

Portrait is a two-hander superbly performed by Danielle Baskerville and Robert Kingsbury. Their interaction is the metaphor for the symbiosis between the artist (Kingsbury) and his imagination (Baskerville). On a superficial level, the close play of the couple is also an intimate and charming portrait of lovers.

Hoskins tools include a film component by Nico Stagias, along with song, text, and composer Gilles Goyette's dramatic score. Everyday movement alternates with passages of choreography, which lighting designer Simon Rossiter bathes in a warm glow.

The work is an inventive series of vignettes, some of them extremely droll. The result is an intriguing series of images about close encounters. The end of each episode is marked by the performers snapping back into reality and arranging for the next scene, just as in life, reality steps in to interrupt an artist at work.

As the audience come in, Baskerville is putting on Kingsbury's makeup. The warmth between them is palpable, and so, from the beginning, we are drawn into their embrace. AS the lights dim, the overhead screen displays a grainy, black and white Barbra Streisand from the beginning of her career singing *Happy Days Are Here Again*. The lyrics speak of a creator being inspired. This impulse to create is his happiness.

As Kingsbury leans against a wall smoking a cigarette, Baskerville focuses a video cam that displays his face on the screen. Beneath his watchful gaze, she engages in a series of staccato movements involving rapid limb thrusts and physical distortions. Propelled by the driving force of percussion, not one part of her body remains untouched by this impulse to move.

At the end of this sequence, the subtitle "I gotta quit. This is killing me." appears under Kingsbury's face. This is Hoskins the satirist kicking in, and his drollness can be read on many levels. Baskerville has done all the work, but the silent spectator Kingsbury is the one tired from the creative effort. This delicious dichotomy continues throughout the work, reminding us that there is as much struggle as joy in artistic creation.

The two excellent performers completely understand Hoskins's love/hate relationship with the act of creation.



May 30-June 6, 2002

PICKING PECKER

D.A. HOSKINS'S WOODPECKER PIPES UP

BY GLENN SUMI

D.A. Hoskins is back after an absence of a few years, the edgy indie choreographer who's unafraid of taking on taboo topics is gradually stepping back into the Toronto dance scene. Is he ready? And are we? "I've been working away, checking out the scene, and I've realized that it's time to be not so precious about the corporate reality of dance, or the media's response," says Hoskins, who's kept busy with commissions from groups like the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony and the Penderecki String Quartet. He was also resident choreographer with Dancetheatre David Earle.

His work *Crave* debuted last December in a mixed program, and for a guy known for his sculptural, formal moves, it signalled a different aesthetic.

Utilizing everything from a video monitor about body image to a plastic baby doll, *Crave* was unabashedly theatrical. Sure, it snaked around themes of sexuality and repression, which he's dealt with before, but the approach was immediate and relevant, adjectives you don't normally apply to contemporary dance.

"I've set up exercises to re-inspire myself," he admits. "When I started creating dance, I was very inspired by the modern dance idiom, but then I started tiring of it. I'm focusing now on sensory expressionism. I've had to think about what's affecting me -- the media, TV, cyberland. Today's aesthetic is very different. How we feel is different."

Hoskins's new piece, part of the Series 8:08 season finale program, is called *Woodpecker*; it surfaced in a different form last year at an arts summer school gig in BC. Originally choreographed for an ensemble, it's been redeveloped as a duet for Danielle Baskerville and Mike Moore, and touches on themes of parental nourishment, scolding, caring and taunting.

Hoskins laughs off the homoerotic connotations of the title, although he jokes that pretty much everything is sexually suggestive to him. He spent time in Stanley Park, listening to woodpeckers in the forest. Some of the physical movements have a birdlike quality.

Hoskins hasn't mounted a full-length local show since 1997's *Mortality Songs*, a fundraiser for the Toronto People with AIDS Foundation. He'd like to take some of his recent work, including the commissions, and put something together.

Last month he worked on Serge Bennathan's choreography for the opera *Julius Caesar*. "I didn't know Serge before, but now I'm probably going to attack him and ask him for space, ask him to give me Dancemakers for a weekend. I'm hungry to present work. This year I want to reinvest in the work I've done and show stuff that hasn't been seen here before."