



## SPOTLIGHT

### THE ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is celebrating its 75th anniversary with an ambitious full-length work inspired by a very difficult subject. The new ballet *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation* deals with the traumatic experiences of First Nations children who were torn from their roots and placed in residential schools. The creative collaborators are a starry lot, indeed – choreographer Mark Godden, composer Christos Hatzis and acclaimed native Canadian author Joseph Boyden. In preparation, Godden spent a year and a half following live streaming of the testimonies by former students at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. The plot revolves around four characters, two in the present and two in the past at residential schools, and how they are linked together. Hatzis has incorporated powwow music of the Northern Cree Singers and the unique stylizations of Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq into the score. The title comes from the aboriginal name for the North Star – the Going Home Star – which helped the native people in their navigations. Says Boyden: “We are taking a very European form and introducing it to a First Nations experience.” – Paula Citron

*Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation* is at Winnipeg’s Centennial Concert Hall from Oct. 1 to 5 ([rwb.org](http://rwb.org)).



## EDITOR'S PICK SEARCH FOR TRUTH

OCT 1-5

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet begins their 75th season with **Going Home Star—Truth and Reconciliation** (above). Commissioned by Artistic Director André Lewis with the support of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the piece marries the First Nations experience with a European form to represent the varied stories of residential school survivors and their families. Tickets available at the RWB box office, 380 Graham Ave, 204-956-2792, or at [rwb.org](http://rwb.org). Centennial Concert Hall, 555 Main St.



## THE WRITE STUFF

SEP 19-27

A bookworm's dream, the annual **THIN AIR Winnipeg International Writer's Festival** showcases authors from Canada and around the world, with performances, interviews, lectures, book launchings and signings. This year's guests include multi-award winning Eleanor Catton from New Zealand, as well as local legends David Bergen and Miriam Toews (pictured). Pick up a free program or visit [thinairwinnipeg.ca](http://thinairwinnipeg.ca) for more information. Festival passes and programs available at McNally Robinson Booksellers, tickets for individual events available at the door, some events free. Various venues, 204-297-7323.

## FEST FOR ALL

SEP 5-7

Downtown's biggest street festival is back as Broadway closes to vehicular traffic for the three-day block party, **Manyfest**. Watch movies on the big screen in Memorial Park, sample local craft beer and fine wine, or get up and glow at the Electric Donkey Run. The festival also hosts Food Truck Wars, where Winnipeg's best street eats will be crowned, and Ciclovía (below), a celebration of active transportation. Visit [manyfest.ca](http://manyfest.ca) for full events listings and more information.



PHOTOS: FORT GEORGE CEMETERY 1946, LIBRARY & ARCHIVES CANADA

# Looking Back to Move Forward

Royal Winnipeg Ballet premieres a ballet about Canada's segregated history.

A company that usually sticks to crowd-pleasing story ballets, Royal Winnipeg Ballet will open its 75th-anniversary season with a work centered on a controversial topic. *Going Home Star—Truth and Reconciliation*, choreographed by former RWB dancer Mark Godden, is inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, established in response to a federal policy that forced indigenous children to leave their families for Indian Residential Schools. The goal of these boarding programs, which were government funded from the 1880s to the mid-1990s, was to assimilate indigenous children into white culture, and students were cruelly punished if they did not conform. "It's a Canadian story," says Godden, who read survivor testimonials to prepare for the ballet, which premieres October 1–5 at Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg. "I think it's important to get people talking about the injustices that humans have done to one another."

The work's purpose, says Godden, is to apologize for Canada's history of human rights abuse and to honor indigenous heritage. The full-length story ballet will include performances by Steve Wood and the Northern Cree Singers and Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq, plus a



Choreographer Mark Godden leads rehearsal at RWB.

libretto by writer Joseph Boyden. "I think Canadians need to understand," says Boyden, "that for almost 100 years, our First Nations Peoples were not allowed to practice their own dance, speak their own language or participate in their own religions."

Godden is proud that RWB, and Canadians in general, are willing to look back into the country's unpleasant past—even if it is, ironically, through the lens of an art form with European roots. "You can't make change if you can't see the error of your ways. These stories are so deep and personal. I was completely swallowed up by them." —Deirdre Kelly

## ARTS &amp; LIFE

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New ballet brought together diverse group of creators to deal with difficult subject

# Dialogue through dance

## DancePreview

### Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation

■ Royal Winnipeg Ballet  
 ■ Wednesday to Sunday, Centennial Concert Hall  
 ■ Tickets start at \$29 via [www.rwb.org](http://www.rwb.org) or 204-956-2792  
 ■ The RWB is holding its first Pay What You Can evening on Thursday. Pay What You Can tickets will be available in person at the concert hall two hours before the performance.

By Jen Zoratti

OVER a decade ago, the late elder Mary Richard sat in the office of André Lewis, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's artistic director. She had an idea that would bring indigenous and non-indigenous people together in collaboration and conversation.

On Wednesday night at the Centennial Concert Hall, the curtain will rise on Richard's vision.

The RWB will open its 75th season with *Going Home Star* — *Truth and Reconciliation*, a new full-length ballet created with the support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Written by Giller Prize-winning novelist Joseph Boyden and choreographed by Mark Godden, the brains behind some of RWB's most provocative works, including *Dracula* and *Svenkali*, *Going Home Star* — *Truth and Reconciliation* was inspired by the harrowing recollections of survivors of Canada's residential school system.

In the ballet, we are introduced to Annie (soloist Sophia Lee), a young, urban First Nations woman who is disconnected from her culture and caught up in a life of excess. When Gordon (principal dancer Liang Xing), a trickster disguised as a homeless man, meets her, they embark on a healing spiritual journey, learning that without truth, you cannot have reconciliation.

The ballet is choreographed to a visceral score by Juno-winning composer Christos Hatzis that features the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Grammy nominees Steve Wood & the Northern Cree Singers and Inuk throat singer (and recent Polaris Music Prize winner) Tanya Tagaq, with set design by Winnipeg indigenous visual artist KC Adams.

*Going Home Star* — *Truth and Reconciliation* is the result of five years of hard work by a host of talented people. "Originally, what I really wanted with this — and I think it reflects Mary's wishes — was

to have a diverse group of creators," Lewis says. "I feel reconciliation can be achieved through this combination of people. It's a very powerful work. The subject matter is a delicate one, but we've been very fortunate to have Tina Keeper. Without her, I wouldn't have taken it on."

Lewis and Jeff Herd, RWB's executive director, approached the Cree actress, media producer and former member of Parliament five years ago, looking to discuss a potential project with an indigenous focus.

"I think they just wanted me to listen and give notes," Keeper says. "When I found out from André that the inspiration for this project came from his relationship with the late elder Mary Richard, I was really thrilled by that. I was really impressed by it. I think that often as aboriginal people, we struggle a lot to have our voices heard. That's part of our life experience."

For decades, what happened in Canada's residential schools — a system of forced assimilation meant to "kill the Indian in the child" — wasn't talked about; the lasting effects of abuse and cultural erasure was poorly understood. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established in 2008, survivors came forward. The silence — and the shame and stigma that came with it — was finally starting to be broken.

Continued  
 Please see **DIALOGUE D5**



Main image: soloist Sophia Lee as Annie in *Going Home Star*, above: RWB dancers participate in a pipe ceremony in Libau

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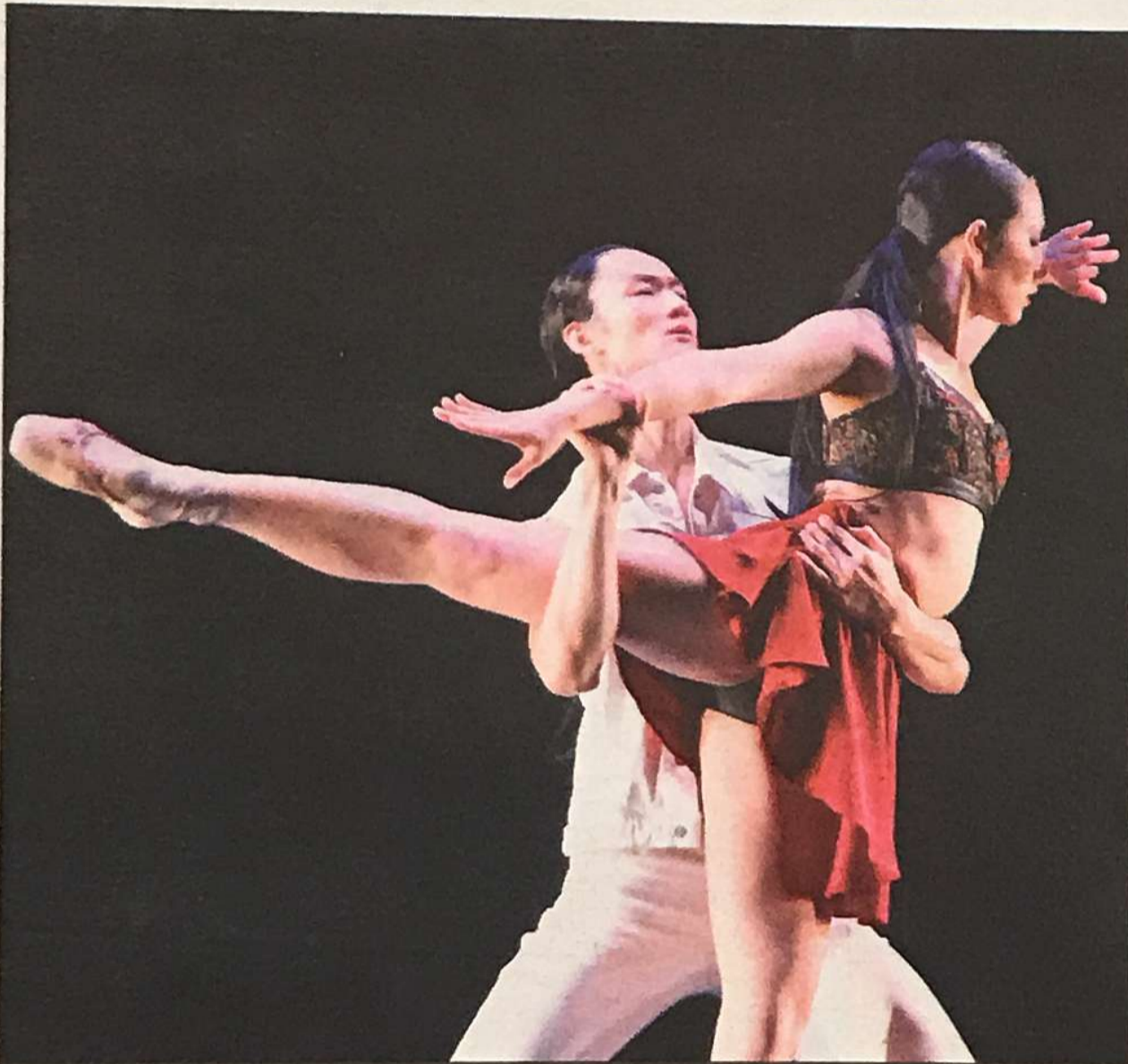


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## DOLLS THAT KILL

WITH ANOTHER TALE OF A DEADLY DOLL COMING TO A THEATRE NEAR YOU, METRO LOOKS BACK AT HOLLYWOOD'S DANGEROUS DUMMIES **PAGE 14**



## THE STAGE IS SET

Royal Winnipeg Ballet soloist Sophia Lee and principal dancer Liang Xing play Annie and Gordon in *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation* during a media preview on Tuesday. Based on a story by acclaimed author Joseph Boyden, *Going Home Star* makes its worldwide debut on Wednesday at the Centennial Concert Hall. **BERNICE PONTANILLA/METRO**

# Review so police han of missing

**Tina Fontaine** . Two officers came across the 15-year-old during a traffic stop in August — a week after she had been reported missing

**Quoted**

"It is unfathomable that police officers would not take into the account the disappearance of a teenage girl who had been reported missing."

Cameron Alexis, Alberta regional chief of police with the Assembly of First Nations

The Assembly of First Nations is calling for an independent probe of how police handled the disappearance of a teen whose body was eventually pulled from the Red River wrapped in a bag.

Police in Winnipeg are conducting an internal investigation after discovering two officers came across Tina Fontaine during a traffic stop in August — a week after she had been reported missing — but did not take her into custody.

The 15-year-old was last seen the following day. Fontaine's body was found more than a week later.

Police say the two officers have been put on administrative duties while the investigation is ongoing.

But Cameron Alexis, Alberta regional chief of police with the Assembly of First Nations, says an internal review is not enough and the police should bring in independent investigators.

"It is unfathomable that police officers would not take into their care a teenage girl who had been reported missing."

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# Powerful new ballet breaks ground, hearts

**G**OING *Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation* might well be the most important ballet produced by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in its 76-year history.

The company kicked off its diamond anniversary season Wednesday night with the highly anticipated world premiere choreographed by Mark Godden. It's a work 10 years in the making, first envisioned by late Cree elder/activist Mary Richard and artistic director André Lewis, and in turn supported by the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the production's associate producer Tina Keeper.

The nearly two-hour story ballet openly acknowledges Canada's painful legacy of government-sanctioned residential schools, where indigenous children were ripped from their families and forced into boarding schools designed to "kill the Indian in the child." The fact that this tale, inspired by survivor recollections that emerged through the commission's investigation, is being told via a 400-year old European art form serves as further testament to healing.

Based on a story by Canadian novelist Joseph Boyden, Godden's mostly classical ballet tells the tale of First Nations woman Annie (soloist Sophia Lee), a young urbanite hairdresser caught up in a downward spiral of boozing clubbing and meaningless hook-ups with *Random Lover* (second soloist Tristan Dobrowney). After meeting trickster Gordon (principal dancer Liang Xing), she becomes spirited away to confront the devastating truth of the residential schools. She witnesses with him as stone-faced clergymen beat their young wards, until they both finally discover a sense of peace through reconciliation.

Christos Hatzis's tour-de-force score viscerally integrates contributions from recent Polaris Prize-winning Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq, Steve Wood and the Northern Cree Singers with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra superbly led by Tadeusz Biernacki. The Toronto-based composer's multi-layered, electro-acoustic score is a game-changer. Mangled hymn tunes bleed into Tagaq's guttural vocalizations, and it even pays a shy nod to *Swan Lake* as Annie flies through the air in her dreams.

Winnipeg visual artist KC Adams' tour-friendly set design of cold brick walls contrasts with more naturalistic items such as suspended birch trees, arched whale bones, which become a visual theme, and a giant, luminous turtle shell. Sean Nieuwenhuis's video projections of starry night skies, gently falling snow and hurtling subway tunnels add texture and dimensionality while Pierre Lavoie's shadowy lighting underscores mood.

The Montreal-based Godden has always excelled at creating darkly dramatic characters,



**HOLLY HARRIS**  
MUSIC MATTERS

## ConcertReview

### Royal Winnipeg Ballet

- Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation
- Centennial Concert Hall
- To Oct. 5

★★★★★ out of five

such as the brooding Svengali or tortured Dracula in earlier RWB ballets. His generically titled Clergyman joins his nefarious club. Dressed in costume designer Paul Daigle's flowing black robes, soloist Dmitri Dovgoselets filled the stage with terror every time he appeared, finally exploding like a powder keg when whipping aboriginal child Charlie (soloist Yosuke Mino). It was a scene that was almost unbearable to watch. However, his rape of young girl Niska (corps member Alanna McArdie) seemed strangely subdued as the ultimate corporal punishment.

At times, *Going Home Star* risks losing its own North Star. The plot-heavy narrative becomes obfuscated, with its Act II scene depicting colonization teetering on didacticism. The choice to include recorded excerpts of survivor stories, ironically, upstaged and distracted from the choreography. Some of the story's symbolism doesn't always read clearly, and unless one studies the tome-like, four-page plot synopsis well in advance, several aspects simply get lost in translation.

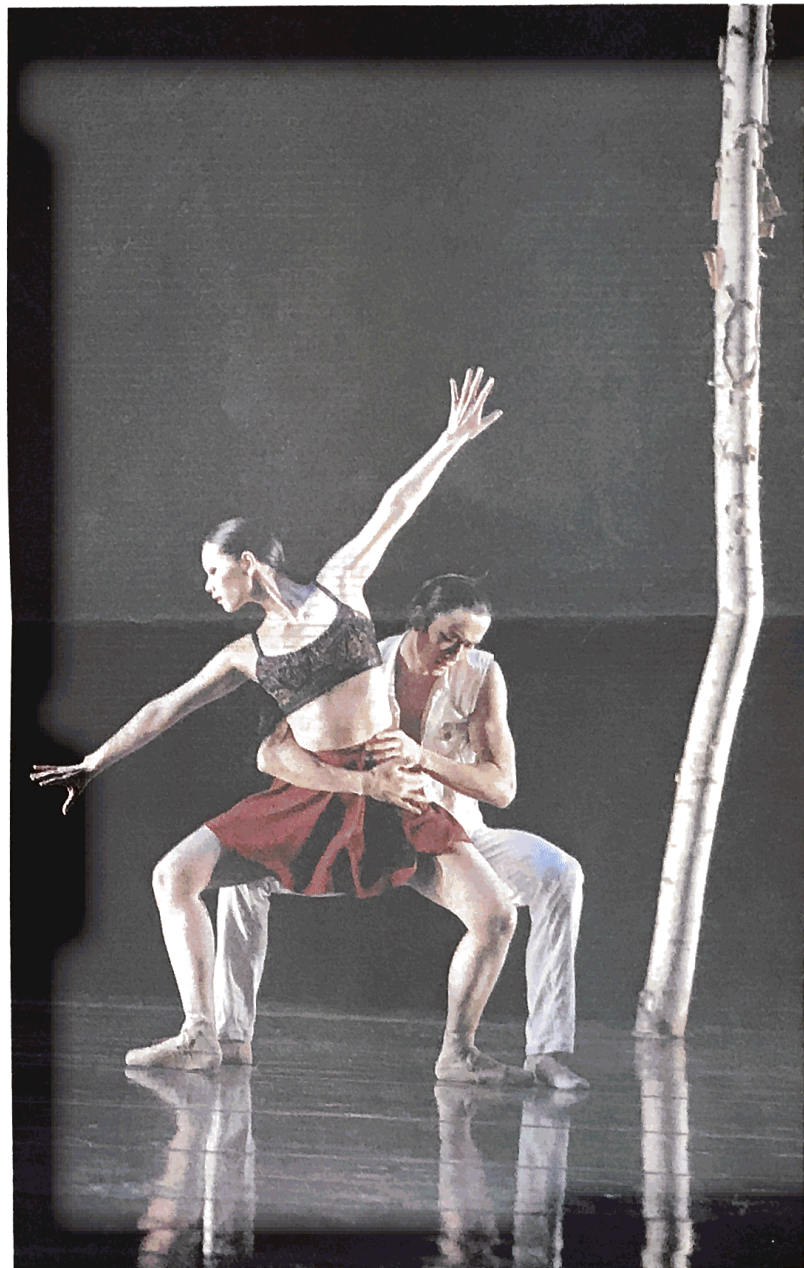
Still, the re-energized company has never looked better. Its corps de ballet members performing as *Urban Women and Men*, *Clergymen*, the *Divine Louis* and *Star Children* showcase Godden's unmistakable choreographic melting pot of contemporary-infused flexed feet and cocked wrists juxtaposed with traditionally balletic pirouettes and battements.

Both Lee and Xing in the lead roles — and with nary a second cast or any understudies in sight — also proved their keen acting skills, with their razor-sharp and wholly believable performances as the ballet's two truth-seekers. Mother (soloist Yayoi Ban) and Father (corps member Thiago Dos Santos) serve as a moral presence, with their tearful parting scene with daughter Niska.

By providing a bookend to its equally groundbreaking 1971 premiere of Norbert Vesak's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, *Going Home Star* marks a significant turning point for the 75-year old company. The opening-night crowd included aboriginal elders and other members of the aboriginal community.

By presenting what is likely the world's first full-length First Nations-inspired ballet, *Going Home Star* also ensures the RWB's own place in dance history, with its message of hope, cast against a backdrop of ever-rising numbers of murdered and missing aboriginal women, never more desperately needed.

holly.harris@shaw.ca



Sophia Lee and Liang Xing in *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*.

RUTH BONNEVILLE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS



# Winnipeg Royal Ballet performing story on the Residential School Experience

By Kelly Many Guns

Canada's Winnipeg Royal Ballet will celebrate its 75th anniversary with the world premiere of *Going Home Star—Truth and Reconciliation*, a new creation of both told and untold stories of the residential school experience. *Going Home Star* is the story of Annie, a young First Nations woman drifting in a contemporary life of youthful excess. But when she meets Gordon, a longhaired trickster disguised as a homeless man, she's propelled into a world she's always sensed but never seen. Not only do they travel the streets but also the roads of their ancestors, learning to accept the other's burdens as the two walk through the past and toward the future. Together, both Annie and Gor-

don learn that without truth, there is no reconciliation.

Tina Keeper, associate producer, expressed her thoughts about the Winnipeg Royal Ballet's upcoming performance.

"The creative process has been wondrous, and the performance is going to be so special and spectacular," said Keeper. "Everything from dancers, the music, the artistic setting, and the story is going to be rich and unbelievable." Keeper, who is best known to Canadian audiences as RCMP officer Michelle Kenidi on the long running CBC hit

introduced to the project five years ago by



**"Everything from dancers, the music, the artistic setting and the story is going to be rich and unbelievable."**  
- Tina Keeper, associate producer

WRB artistic director Andre Lewis. "Andre told me about his commitment to elder Mary Richards (Ah Kha Ko Cheesh) and her wish to one day see a performance based on the residential school experience. I had seen WRB's adaption of *Ecstasy of Rita Joe* in 1971 about a young Aboriginal woman in the city, and I thought this was the next step, and a new story could be told."

Keeper said it was so difficult to get the initial story interpreted through ballet, and at times she almost quit because of her own personal experiences with Truth and Reconciliation (TRC). "When we decided to get author Joseph Boyden on board to write the story, everything seemed to start coming together, and I'm so excited and honoured to be a part this project," said Keeper. "*Going Home Star* has the enormous capability to tell a story to the world about Aboriginal people and Canadian society. *It is our parents and*

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Stage

## Dancing in the dark

*Joseph Boyden on the harrowing yet wondrous journey of creating a ballet*

I STILL REMEMBER the day a couple of years ago when the brilliant actor, producer and director Tina Keeper called me at home with what she promised was exciting news. After some small talk, she blurted it out: "Joseph," she said, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and I would like you to be involved in a ballet." She went on to explain that Royal Winnipeg Ballet artistic director André Lewis was inspired by the late Anishnabe elder Mary Richard, who happened to be a season ticket holder, to create a new Aboriginal-themed dance. "You have to do it," Tina said.

I was taken aback. "I'm, ah, I'm really not much of a dancer, you know. And I'd probably feel really self-conscious wearing tights in public."

There was a bit of a pause on the other end. "No. Joseph. God, no. We don't want you to dance in a ballet. Really, we don't. But we would like you to help create one." Tina went on to explain. After five gruelling yet vitally necessary years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)—travelling back and forth across Canada to record the testimonies of First Nations survivors who were, for more than a century, submitted to our brutal and misguided system of forcefully removing children from their families and communities in an attempt to "re-educate" them—would be reaching the end of its mandate in 2014. The idea of a ballet to commemorate

**In the air:** *The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is behind Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation*





the years of pain, the years of calling on survivors to come forth and allow their experiences to be recorded and archived, the years of making sure that our country never forgets, needed to end in a surge of beauty across a stage.

Still, I wanted to immediately say to Tina that I knew nothing of ballets. The last time I'd even been close to one was when I was seven and fidgeting at my sister Suzanne's rehearsal as little girls in pigtails bounced around and fell down and curtsied. But I'd promised myself not that long ago that the only way to continue growing as a writer, as a person, as an artist, was to never say no to a writing challenge that frightened me. "Yes, Tina, of course!" I blurted. "Let's do this." My wife, Amanda, stared incredulously at me when I got off the phone to tell her what was brewing.

Fast-forward two years, and our country's oldest, and certainly one of its most prestigious companies, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, is about to debut *Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation* on Oct. 1.

What a journey these last couple of years have been.

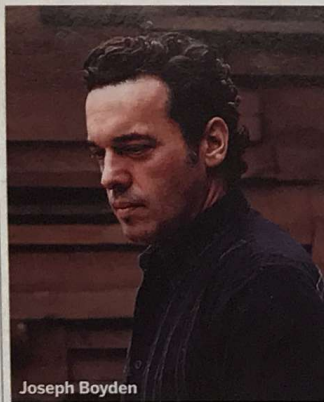
I THINK EVERYONE involved will agree that it wasn't easy getting this project off the ground. Any project where you bring together highly talented people like André Lewis, choreographer Mark Godden, composer Christos Hatzis or the incomparable Tina Keeper, not to mention the brilliant musicians Tagaq and the Northern Cree Singers, so much energy will be pulsing through the virtual room. Maybe too much. And when you're dealing with a subject like residential schools and how best to bring that very particular experience to the stage, when so many of the artists involved have never lived with the weight of its history or the daily reminders of its long and negative reach, it's easy to see how mental boundaries and defences and sensitivities can bubble to the surface.

Adding to these concerns, I couldn't shake my own doubts as to whether or not I was the right person for the job. Novelists work mostly alone, and we hope our stories become three-dimensional in our readers' minds. But on an actual and literal stage? Mark Godden took the role of point man, speaking with me on the phone regularly those first months, assuring me that I was the one to help create the story, kindly expressing that my novels had opened his eyes to certain Aboriginal Canadian experiences that he'd never known about before. Not until he suggested he come down to my home in New Orleans to talk

more and show me film of some of his past work did I realize that we were all in it for the long run. The ballet was on.

Mark's number of days in the Big Easy, and our long talks about ballet in general and the importance of creating one to celebrate the winding down of the TRC's mandate specifically, ended up bringing to the surface what was holding me back. My fear, I suddenly realized, wasn't that I couldn't do it. It was that I questioned the very concept of using such a Western art as ballet in order to try to bring to life a First People's story.

*Why not take a very European form and introduce it to a First Nations experience? To meld these two could only be fascinating.*



Joseph Boyden

Amanda was the one who suggested that I take a crash course in the history of ballet so that I might not just better understand what I was doing but more importantly why so many of us were gathering to attempt this. And so the two of us rented and watched a number of classics together: *Don Quixote*, *Giselle*, *La Bayadère* and, of course, *Swan Lake*. And I loved them. Here were tales being told through gorgeous human movement, cutting right to the heart. Why not, I asked myself, teary-eyed at the end of a DVD of *Romeo and Juliet*, take a very European form and introduce it to a First Nations experience? To meld these two could only be fascinating on stage. Time to get to work.

I wanted the heart of the ballet to centre

on the teachings of the four directions and the traditional First Nations' colours that they represent. This would offer the story a natural structure and would allow me to create principal characters who could interact with one another. While on a book tour for *The Orenda*, I found the chance in Toronto to lock myself in a hotel room for a few days to try and piece together some kind of narrative that I imagined taking shape on a ballet stage. Briefly, this is what I came up with:

The young, hip and beautiful Annie is South; she is red. She represents youth and summer when life is at its easiest. She's a contemporary Aboriginal woman living in urban Canada, cutting hair in a chic boutique, spending nights clubbing with pretty boys, basically enjoying all that her mother always warned her against. Life's too short, after all, not to find another party or date.

Gordon is North and is represented by the colour white; he is a man of the winter. Thin and tough, he's homeless and lives a hand-to-mouth existence on the big city streets. But Gordon's no victim. Despite his harsh circumstances, Gordon's always remembered his grandmother's stories of Nanabush the trickster, and Gordon has taught himself the ability to appear to others as he sees fit.

Niska is West, black, representing the earth as well as the strong grounding beat of the drum. She's a young woman who is imprisoned in a residential school of the past. Niska is from a family of healers, but a family that was forced to give her up to the authorities. In the residential school, Niska is strong-willed and refuses to be broken. She fights the priests and nuns at every turn, suffering horrible abuse for it. She knows one day, though, that she will return to the land and the place of her family.

The child, the promise of life blossoming in spring, is Charlie. He is East, and he represents the spirit and is the colour yellow. He, too, is imprisoned in the residential school of the past, but he believes that he simply needs to follow the train tracks home to reach his family once again, if only he could escape. In the torture of the school, Charlie and Niska have bonded, creating their own family. When the time comes for Charlie to escape, both know that the parting will be particularly painful.

Annie passes Gordon every day as he begs in front of the subway. She ignores him, however, until the day that she has a spare coin. Being the ferryman, Gordon introduces her to a world beyond the current one, where they eventually find a tunnel leading them to a big white building in the forest. Through the



Past pain: Can a non-Aboriginal dance company understand the residential school experience?

windows, Annie and Gordon see two others, similar to themselves: Niska and Charlie, undergoing the horrible trials of the residential school.

Annie can't stand what she sees. Eventually, Annie crosses the line that Gordon warned her not to cross. She smashes the window glass and enters into Niska and Charlie's world. She's captured by the people of the black cloth, as is Gordon. All four are indoctrinated with the strange and frightening rituals of their tormentors, rituals sometimes bizarre, sometimes brutal, even sometimes hilarious.

Using their combined strengths, the four continue to fight the black-clad figures at every turn. Young Charlie finally manages to escape with only a few matches to help get him home along the railroad tracks he remembers his family living close to. What he doesn't know is that the distance to home might be impossibly far for him to walk.

Back at the big white building, the people of the black cloth's abuse turns darker than any of the remaining three can imagine. It's finally gone too far. The three must wrestle for their very souls. The climactic fight is on.

Nervously, I sent the story to Mark and Tina, wondering what they might think. Any writer who's worked on a collaborative project knows that once you turn your work over, it's no longer yours. It belongs to everyone involved. Both Mark and Tina really liked what I'd done. I breathed a sigh of relief. It was time now for the real work to begin.

At first, I could feel the tension of trying to get things off the ground from a distance of thousands of kilometres. Was it possible to get the company to better understand the residential school experience? Tina, Mark,

and Christos had long conversations with each other, and all agreed that even if the dancers were non-Aboriginal, so much of the creative energy of this project was grounded by First Nations, Inuit and Metis people. We had my story, but more importantly we'd attained the musicians that Christos and the rest of us wanted to act as the backbone of the ballet: Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq Gillis and Steve Wood along with the Northern Cree Singers. As well, the costume designer Steve Daigle worked in collaboration with Oji-Cree set designer KC Adams. This was all a very good start.

Both chair Justice Murray Sinclair and commissioner Marie Wilson, as well as residential school survivor Doris Young of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came to talk with everyone, from artistic director to choreographer to composer to dancers. When rehearsals began in earnest, a blessing day was held by elders Mel and Shirley Chartrand that included a pipe ceremony and a sweat-lodge ceremony in which 30 of the dancers and staff participated. For those who decided not to participate in the sweat, residential school survivor Ted Fontaine read from his book *Broken Circle*. The day ended with a feast of traditional foods including bison stew, bannock, wild rice, and pickerel. It proved to be a vital and bonding event. The previous tensions dissipated and we all realized at the same time what was happening. A collaborative and powerful dance was being born.

I'LL ADMIT THAT as the opening night quickly approaches, I've been on pins and needles. My schedule hasn't allowed me to get up to Winnipeg to see the rehearsals, but Tina attends weekly and has shared with me that

she finds the dance both beautiful and devastating. Liang Xing and Sophia Lee play Gordon and Annie, and Yosuke Mino and Alanna McAdie play Charlie and Niska. Tina says the music that helps drive the story is as much a character as the dancers. The echoes of Tagaq's and Steve's voices in the background are tragic and haunting, so much so that Tina admits she cries as she listens and watches.

She says Liang and Sophia are so strong and open, their characters taking us through the journey and into the past. And Yosuke and Alanna as Charlie and Niska ground viewers in the experiences of residential school, making us sink before buoying us up again.

"The dancers have been so engaged," Tina writes to me. "And certainly so have Mark and André." She goes on to say that both have participated in a number of Truth and Reconciliation national events.

"We also worked with Murray Sinclair to guide us through some of the rough patches when we were ambivalent about doing the project," Tina adds. "When we were trying to determine whether we were doing 'reconciliation' correctly, we arrived at a place where we decided that we couldn't determine whether we were doing it right or wrong, and that it is about engagement and an earnest effort—this is where we understood that this was a creation which had indigenous and non-indigenous collaborators to be performed by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet—this was our process of reconciliation."

When I ask André what this work means to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, he says, "We knew right from the start that this ballet represents something bigger than all of us. We hope the work goes beyond the story on stage. We want to be able to help bring awareness to this part of Canadian history that so many know little of—the best way we can express it and hopefully touch many people."

I email Tina to double-check that the Royal Winnipeg Ballet won't be needing me to pull on some tights and work my dance moves. I also let her know that my mother will be joining Amanda and me for the opening night. Tina's thrilled. She tells me that three of the people involved in bringing *Going Home Star* to the stage, including Tina, have lost their mothers this year. "I feel like they'll be sitting with your mom, with all of us," Tina says. "It's beautiful. It's perfect!"

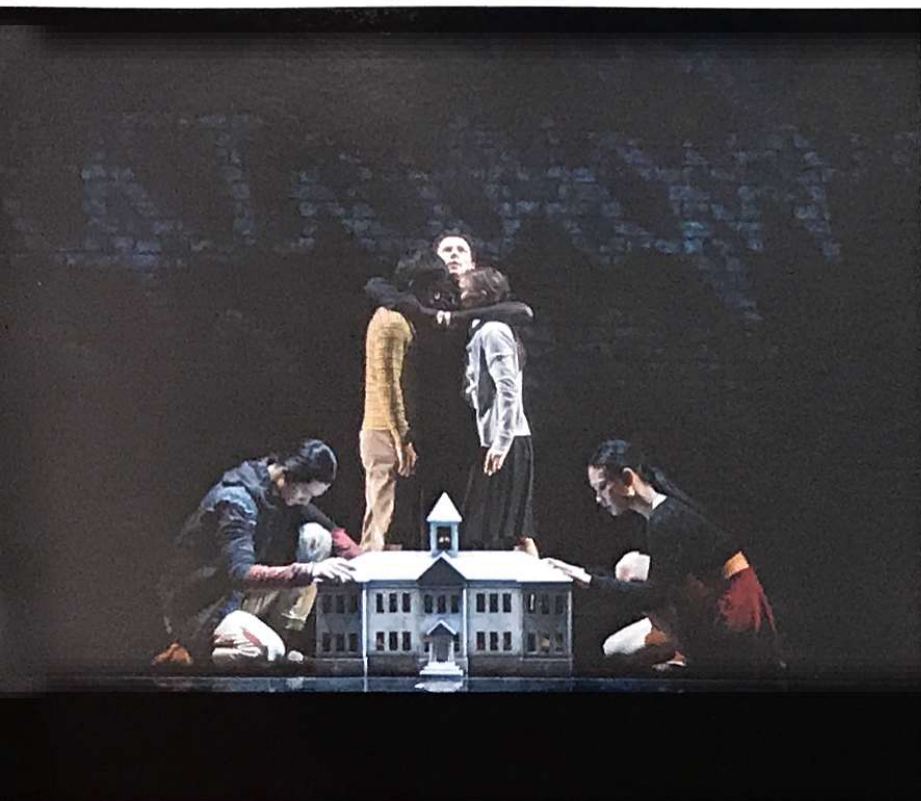
I ask her to tell me more.

"It's been a harrowing, wondrous journey," Tina says. "I have to think," she adds, "that this concept called 'reconciliation' might just provide us the opportunity to all be greater than we ever imagined." ♦

# Bringing communities together through dance

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet shines a light on the Residential School tragedy

BY BARB FARWELL



Far left: Ballet is no stranger to tragedy. The Royal Winnipeg Ballet company dancers tell the story of the Indian Residential Schools

Centre top: The music of Polaris Prize-winning Inuk Throat Singer Tanya Tagaq was combined with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra to create a unique original score

Centre bottom: As part of their preparation for the ballet, the dancers attended a pipe ceremony in Libau, Manitoba, north of Winnipeg

Left: *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation* is based on a story by novelist Joseph Boyden about Indian Residential School survivors and their families

Above: Liang Xing as Gordon the trickster and Sophia Lee as Annie

## TO CELEBRATE

its 75th season, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (RWB) premiered a ballet about a troubling story from Canada's past – the abuse of children at Indian Residential Schools.

"For our anniversary we wanted to make a statement about where we live, especially on the prairies," said Executive Director Jeff Herd. "And we wanted that to include our Indigenous culture."

The result was *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation*, based on a story by Joseph Boyden about Indian Residential School survivors and their families. This classical-style ballet focuses on the journey Annie, a young urban First Nations woman, takes with a trickster named Gordon as they travel through the past to connect with their ancestors and discover the horrible truth of what happened at the Residential Schools. The ballet ends with the two coming together and reconciling with their past.

This isn't the first time the RWB has delved into some of the painful issues affecting the First Nations' population. In 1971, the

company adapted *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, George Ryga's play about an Aboriginal woman's tragic journey from the reservation to the city. It was a success and seen by audiences as far away as Australia, but since then there hasn't been another new Canadian ballet to take on a specifically Indigenous theme.

The idea for *Going Home Star* actually came about 10 years ago when the late Cree elder and arts advocate Mary Richards met with the RWB to talk about ways to bring the First Nations and arts communities together. It was a good match, Herd said. Like Aboriginal culture, ballet is full of spiritual stories and mythology, such as *Swan Lake*.

### Dance and tragedy

Ballet is also no stranger to tragedy – just think about the doomed lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* and of Giselle dying from a broken heart. "The world of dance is an appropriate medium to show strong emotion," said Herd. "If anything could tell the story of the Indian Residential Schools – the art of dance could."

Artistic director André Lewis and choreographer Mark Godden would eventually spend three years working on the project. With the support and guidance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada – which was established to tell Canadians about the history of the Residential Schools and the impact it has had on the children who were separated from their families and sent there – and actor Tina Keeper, who came on board as associate producer, they strived to understand what happened at the schools and translate that into the language of ballet.

For the music, composer Christos Hatzis was commissioned to create an original score that merged traditional aboriginal music from artists such as the Polaris Prize-winning Inuk Throat Singer Tanya Tagaq, Steve Wood and the Northern Cree Singers, with the symphonic music of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

"It was a composite of creators bringing this story together, just like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission brought people

together to tell their stories and create an understanding of what happened," said Herd.

Herd said reaction to the ballet, which was performed in Winnipeg from October 1 to 5, was outstanding. "A high percentage of our population is Indigenous. We need to understand it, accept it and embrace it. Our success shows there is an appetite for this."

Plans are currently in the works to tour the ballet across Canada, the United States and possibly overseas. Herd also hopes *Coming Home Star* will help the RWB reach out to Indigenous communities to spark potential careers in dance – and to show young First Nations people how dance can be a great vehicle for enhancing self-esteem and well-being.

"It changed us. It changed me," said Herd. "I grew up in Winnipeg and while I've been aware of the positives and negatives of the [Aboriginal experience] – to actually participate in something that creates a better understanding was fantastic." EQ

# Racial reconciliation comes to the stage – in upcoming world premiere of major RWB ballet

Joan Cohen

In a fall marked by major events in this province, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet is launching its 75th anniversary celebrations with the world premiere Oct. 1 of a full-length ballet that it is hoped will be a milestone in the story of race relations in Canada and with that bring a new public appreciation of the human issues at stake. The ballet, *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation*, grew out of the testimony put before Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in its arduous, recently completed hearings, and recreates the stories, "told and untold" by Indian Residential School survivors and their families.

The ballet, commissioned by the RWB, has a full-length musical score, which is also having its world premiere. The music is being performed with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

The inspiration for the work happened over 10 years ago, a RWB release explains. Well-known elder, Mary Richard, a long-time patron of the RWB, nursing a "dream of reconciliation" between aboriginal and non-aboriginal races, approached artistic director André Lewis with the suggestion a ballet be created to bring the two communities together. She has since died.

It took a few years, but in time Lewis and associate producer Tina Keeper, the well-known actress, media producer and former MP, established a creative team for the project, with the support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, under Hon. Justice Murray Sinclair. From the start, the project was in immensely able hands.

With famed choreographer Mark Godden, the distinguished best-selling Métis author Joseph Boyden, cos-



Royal Winnipeg Ballet soloist, Sophia Lee. Photo by Réjean Brandt Photography.

tume designer Paul Daigle and Metis visual artist KC Adams in charge of set design, the job was underway. Greek born, internationally renowned Canadian composer Christos Hatzis was commissioned to write the full-length ballet score and which features on stage famed

Inuk throat singer Tanyaa Tagaq and Cree traditional musicians, Steve Wood and the Northern Cree Singers.

The RWB outlines the story in an online release ([www.rwb.org/75thseason/lineup](http://www.rwb.org/75thseason/lineup)):

"*Going Home Star* explores the world of Annie, a young, urban First Nations woman adrift in a contemporary life of youthful excess. But when she meets Gordon, a long-haired trickster disguised as a homeless man, she's propelled into a world she has always sensed but never seen. Not only do they travel the streets of this place but also the roads of their ancestors, learning to accept the other's burdens as the two walk through the past and toward the future. Together, both Annie and Gordon learn that without truth, there is no reconciliation."

This isn't a written story. Author Joseph Boyden, collaborating with André Lewis, created with this piece a story that would be told through dance.

Boyden, on video, speaks with a quiet passion, always articulate. In a comment recorded while the work was still being created, he explained: "Ballet cuts right to the heart of what's most beautiful, physically, in humanity and what's most beautiful in story. We are taking a very European form and introducing it to a First Nations experience. We'll find a way to meld this meeting of these two very different places in a fascinating way on the stage." It's said he has.

But let the last word here go to Justice Murray Sinclair: "These are profound, compelling themes, not just for aboriginal families and communities, but for all Canadians," he reminds us.

The ballet is being performed at the Centennial Concert Hall from Oct. 1 to Oct. 5. The RWB is hoping to tour the work later, but no formal announcement has yet been made. For tickets, please call 204-956-2792.

# Groundbreaking, unorthodox ballet attracts a wider audience to Royal Winnipeg Ballet

The ballet is making moves toward a more diverse patronage, with fresh programming and price reduction programs

Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet (RWB) debuted its 75th year with a sharp detour from programming as usual.

By daring to tackle the inter-generational effects of residential schools in *Going Home Star - Truth and Reconciliation*, the ballet company broke the mould and in turn welcomed a new audience eager to see how the theme was presented.

First-time ballet attendee Danielle Robidoux said it was the first time she had been excited to see a ballet, and it had provoked water-cooler discussion at her workplace with other young staff leading up to the show.

The modernity and complexity of the show's theme seemed to serve as an invitation to a wider audience; it allowed the age-old art form to seem forward-thinking and become palatable to more viewers.

Getting new people in the seats was also helped along by price incentives.

The program *Access Pointe: Ballet Under 30* reduces the price of admission to a cool \$30 plus taxes and fees for people between the ages of 15-29.

Attendees can purchase up to two tickets at this rate, provided the guest is also under the age of 30.

The only catch is that you have to sign up to become an *Access Pointe* member ahead of time, as you are sent a passcode by email approximately one week from a show's debut, which you can use to redeem the offer. The program is meant to help young adults, students and new professionals make the arts part of their lives while the full-priced admission is still a little out of reach.

In conjunction with *Going Home Star*, the RWB also debuted its first *Pay What You Can* initiative, when for one date of the run, patrons could buy tickets at a reduced rate



**Fresh Cut**  
Brenlee Coates



Liang Xing and Sophia Lee share a kiss in the final scene of the show. Photo by Samanta Katz.

in the two hours leading up to the show (a donation of \$20 was suggested).

This opened the ballet up to any low-income individuals and coincided well with the socially-conscious message being shared in *Going Home Star*.

The *Going Home Star* show was 10 years in

the making, and it kicked off the renowned company's season with so much vim that it will be a tough act for itself to follow.

The show was inspired by the tales of residential school survivors collected by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. It was the vision of the late elder

and activist, Mary Richard, to see the dance company stage something with First Nations origins and a profound social statement.

Adapting a story of this magnitude and putting such a unique spin on the classical 400-year-old European art form was a lot of responsibility to bear to say the least - but it helped that the RWB found enthusiastic participants along the way.

The plot is based on a story penned by prominent Canadian novelist Joseph Boyden, who comes from European and Anishinaabe heritage. He frequently explores themes from First Nations history and culture.

His expertise helped authenticate the show, as did the musical elements from Steve Wood and the Northern Cree Singers and the recent *Polaris* Prize-winner Tanya Tagaq, whose emotive, primal, and alternately soft and coarse voice supported the symphony like the heartbeat of the show. Worthy of mention is also the composer Christos Hatzis' of-the-moment score which was experimental enough to allow Tagaq's thumping, breathy sounds to seep in seamlessly.

Her voice transcends genres and demands to be heard - and it was a rare and perfect fit for the beautiful and simultaneously uncomfortable ballet.

The story was also transposed with audio recordings from residential school survivors' experiences, which supported a more direct and cognizant delivery of the show's message.

While the tale follows two First Nations protagonists; one that at first is disconnected from her heritage and feeling the weight of its absence, and one that can't shake the past - *Going Home Star* reminds us that the history of the residential school system is everyone's story to share, and everyone's to try to reconcile.

Perhaps artistic director André Lewis said it best when he introduced the show: "Truth is important, but also, reconciliation is just as important if not more."

# Truth & Reconciliation

## RWB's new ballet tells residential schools story

DAVID LARKINS  
Winnipeg Sun

It is a delicate story filled with pain and, ultimately, reconciliation and Tina Keeper believes it is perfectly suited for Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

The curtain will be lifted on RWB's 75th season Wednesday with a story that strikes close to home in Manitoba, "Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation," the adaptation of Joseph Boyden's story of the same name that tells the tale of residential school survivors and their families.

Keeper, an associate producer on the production, said at the heart of every ballet is a great story, and suggested *Going Home Star* is well-suited for RWB treatment.

"(It's a) collaboration of indigenous and non-indigenous world-class artists to create something that truly is a remarkable piece of art and I think this story is a perfect story for a ballet," Keeper said.

"... It is a great tragic tale and it's a love story, so I think in that sense it fits very perfectly."

The production is done in consultation with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which was established in 2008 to educate Canadians on the realities of residential schools.

"We hope that we're able to start a conversation among those who would not nec-

essarily ... have familiarized themselves with the stories of residential school survivors," said Murray Sinclair, the commission's chairman. "This is going to bring it home to them. This is also going to be a way for them to see that the artists of their community, the artists of our community, are able to express this in a way that brings some understanding."

Artistic director Andre Lewis said there were challenges in adapting a European art form to tell an aboriginal story. Among the aboriginal cultural elements is Polaris Prize-winning throat singer Tanya Tagaq.

"It definitely has bridges to the aboriginal culture," Lewis said. "... There's so many little things like symbolism that connects with that, and there's also movements that are there without trying to be without that, because we are ballet dancers and we don't try to replicate that, we have too much respect for that culture to simply just try to imitate something."

Keeper said the journey to get to opening night has been a long and emotional one that she predicts will hit her when the lights go down.

"I think when the curtain goes up," she said, "I'm just going to start weeping."

More information can be found at [rwb.org](http://rwb.org).

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HANDOUT

RWB soloist Sophia Lee in the character of Annie is part of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's "Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation."

### WINNIPEG

#### Outlook

**TODAY**  
High 17, Low 8  
Mainly cloudy with 40% probability of precipitation. Winds decreasing to SW 30km/h. Humidex 19.



#### THURSDAY

High 15, Low 5  
Mainly sunny with cloudy periods.



#### FRIDAY

High 8, Low 2  
Cloudy with 40% chance of showers.



#### SATURDAY

High 9, Low 4  
Mainly sunny with cloudy periods.

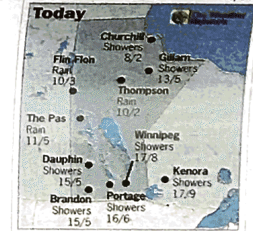


#### SUNDAY

High 7, Low 2  
Variably cloudy.



CANADA	Today	
Calgary	sunny	13/1
Charlottetwn	variable	14/8
Edmonton	showers	12/1
Estevan	showers	12/2
Flt McMurray	showers	10/1
Fredericton	variable	16/7
Halifax	partly sunny	16/7
Kamloops	showers	16/5
Montreal	variable	19/9
Ottawa	variable	20/9
Quebec City	partly cloudy	16/6
Regina	showers	11/1
Saskatoon	showers	12/0
St. John's	variable	14/4
Thunder B.	showers	13/10
Toronto	partly sunny	19/15
Vancouver	partly sunny	15/10
Victoria	variable	15/10



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## HOMESTAR DANCER

Artistic director André Lewis discusses the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's daring season opener

TONY HINDS

 @THETONYHINDS

BEAT REPORTER

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is opening its 2014/15 season by focusing on a subject that might seem an unlikely choice to aficionados of the dance form. *Going Home Star - Truth and Reconciliation*, the new work developed by artistic director André Lewis, examines the untold aftershocks of the Indian residential school system.

The ballet's story follows an Indigenous woman named Annie meeting Gordon, a street-wise trickster and Indian residential school system survivor.

"They meet and build a connection together," Lewis notes. "That connection allows Annie to get in touch with her background and for Gordon to relive his experience in the school system through flashback. It's a love story. In order for Annie and Gordon to connect, he needs to reconcile with his past and fulfill his destiny."

The story of *Going Home Star*, written by Giller Prize- and Canada Reads-winning author Joseph Boyden, took years for

Lewis and choreographer Mark Godden to finally bring it to light.

"In 2004, I was approached by Mary Richard, an Elder from the aboriginal community, who was interested in commissioning us to create a new work based on an Aboriginal theme," Lewis explains. "She felt that through art, we could bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people closer together."

The residential school system, which operated between the late 19th and 20th

century, consisted of up to 80 schools funded by the Canadian government and administered by Catholic, Anglican and United churches. Decades of neglect and abuse caused the Canadian government to eventually issue an apology to Aboriginal Peoples in 2008, prompting Prime Minister Stephen Harper to describe the system as "a sad chapter of our history."

The story of *Going Home Star* - which is produced with support from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Can-



REJEAN BRANDT

ada - may be sobering, but Lewis believes it also promotes a sense of optimism.

"This is not a guilt trip," Lewis confirms. "It's about realizing what happened and *having a hopeful end to it. Reconciliation is part of it: that you reconcile yourself first with your past so that you can move forward. It is difficult to move forward without recognizing that truth.*"

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, an organization Lewis has been a part of for almost 40 years. Lewis clearly remembers his early days in the profession, back when he was a dancer and instructor before advancing to the position of artistic director in 1995.

"I arrived in Winnipeg at the age of 19 with about \$600 in my pocket, my entire life savings," recalls Lewis, who was born in Gatineau, Québec. "No support from anywhere else. My parents were not in a position to be able to support me. But I never looked back. And now, it's about 40 years later."

In the end, Lewis expresses confidence that the emotional side of the story will not be lost on audiences.

"It packs a pretty strong punch but thankfully, that punch is also very beautiful," concludes Lewis.



**Going Home Star - Truth and Reconciliation**

Centennial Concert Hall

October 1 - 5

Tickets start at \$29

Featuring Tanya Tagaq, Steve Wood & the Northern Cree Singers, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Visit [rwb.org](http://rwb.org) for more information.



# Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation explores legacy of residential schools

Royal Winnipeg Ballet offering free admission to survivors, reduced-rate evening to general public

BYRCE HOYE, STAFF

**D**RUG use, promiscuous sex, homelessness, and the cultural sterilization and displacement of an entire nation are all part of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's (RWB) next act.

It's hard to imagine how the carefully choreographed pirouettes and plés of a ballet might be used to explore the generational traumas experienced by Canada's First Nations through the residential school system.

And yet that is exactly what the RWB will attempt to do Oct. 1-5 in *Going Home Star - Truth and Reconciliation*.

"Essentially it's a love story woven around the Truth and Reconciliation Commission findings," says RWB artistic director André Lewis.

The storyline, written by acclaimed aboriginal novelist Joseph Boyden, follows Annie, a young, independent aboriginal woman played by Sophia Lee.

Annie works as a hairdresser and lives an urban life of wild partying, taking on different lovers every night. She grows restless and disconnected.

Eventually Annie encounters a homeless First Nations man, Gordon, portrayed by Liang Xing. Gordon is forced from his home on a reserve at a young age and into the residential school system, eventually fleeing to fend for himself on the street.

The two first meet in the subway, and through that meeting they connect and begin to help each other recover from the legacy of pain

inflicted by the residential school system.

## Support from Aboriginal community

Lewis says the Aboriginal community has been behind the premise of *Going Home Star* since it was in its conceptual phase almost 10 years ago.

"I would've never approached this subject matter if it had not been for Aboriginal people supporting this, but this is not an Aboriginal problem, it's a Canadian problem," says Lewis.

The Aboriginal community as a whole has been supportive of *Going Home Star*, says Lewis, because they feel their story is being told.

"In the ballet itself, you see the effect that the schools have had on the main character, Gordon, and how Annie ultimately helps him and rediscovers her culture, her background; that's why it's called *Going Home Star*, to reconnect with what [the Catholic Church] and a successive government tried to erase."

Although there won't be any First Nations dancers in the ballet, there will be other forms of contributions made from a series of First Nations artists.

"We have Tanya Tagak, who is a throat singer," says Lewis. "We have Steve Wood and the Northern Cree Singers.

"It wasn't going to be just white only Anglo-Saxon men that created the work," says Lewis. "I wanted the continuum, which is why we have

KC Adams [as set designer], who is an installation artist in Winnipeg."

Aside from ballerina Maria Tallchief, formerly of the New York City Ballet and who passed away last year at the age of 88, historically there have been very few Aboriginal people participating at elite levels of ballet in

North America, says Lewis.

So, in an attempt to make the ballet more inclusive, the RWB announced Monday night they are inviting residential school survivors to take in *Going Home Star* for free. There is a limited amount of seating so survivors wishing to attend should

contact the RWB's Angela Hendry at 204-957-3494 or email [groupsales@rwb.org](mailto:groupsales@rwb.org) by Monday, Sept. 29.

They also announced a "Pay What You Can" evening on Oct. 2. Reduced-rate tickets go on sale at 5:30 p.m. the day of the show. Suggested donation price is \$20.



Deschâtelets Archives Missionary Oblates (Q), Sophia Lee

PHOTO BY REJEAN BRANDT PHOTOGRAPHY