2016-2017
FINNISH DANCE
IN FOCUS
DANCE IS SPREADING FAR AND WIDE

Finnish dance field first began to find its feet and grow properly around 30 years ago, and those efforts are now bearing fruit. Many of those who were in the fledgling stages of their careers and who were only just beginning to form their own groups then, are still active and celebrating major anniversaries as artists now. And there’s certainly plenty to celebrate, now that the realisation of a major goal is in sight: the decision to build the Dance House in Helsinki has been made, with doors set to open in 2020.

Choreographer Reetta-Kaisa Ilves ponders whether you could even say that dance feels like too narrow a definition for what those trained as dance artists do nowadays (see p. 34). Dance often also involves making music, song, theatre, performance art or installation art.

One new genre that is fast gaining ground is dance film, and with the abundance of dance films made in Finland it already feels familiar to dance artists as a form of expression. The challenge is, however, capturing and conveying the essence of dance in a way that speaks to people as more than just a beautiful image, according to dance artist and film director Thomas Freundlich (p. 38).

Susanna Leinonen and Jouka Valkama have clearly succeeded in this respect. Their collaboration resulted in the creation, side by side, of the startling yet relevant dance piece SEE | OBEY and the film of the same name. The independent pieces complement one another, and, performed during the same evening create a strong, driving force now (see p. 34). Dance often also involves making music, song, theatre, performance art or installation art.

The heroes of this piece – 50 men – are amateurs, entering this pompous arena as they are: strengths, weaknesses and all. Instead of competition and winners, Partanen’s piece celebrates a sense of community and partnership.

Now is a great time to celebrate dance in Finland. Dance is a part of the everyday lives of many people, spreading to the suburbs and cinemas – and even to saunas with babies (p. 6)! Next year Dancing Finland campaign will get the country on its feet moving, and challenge the whole world to join in. Stay tuned.

Sanna Kangasluoma

Editor

Finnish Dance in Focus 2016–2017
Volume Seventeen

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Publisher: Dance Info Finland
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danceinfo.fi

On the Cover: Fields of Glory
Choreographer: Jarkko Partanen
Cover photography: Katrin Naukkanen

Printed by: Hameen Kiireipamo Oy

With Gratitude: The Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland

Finnish Dance in Focus is published once a year.

ISSN 1795-9837

Dance Info Finland works for Finnish dance since 1980. We promote the position, conditions and visibility of dance art in Finland, and work to build awareness of Finnish dance art abroad. Read more on our new website www.danceinfo.fi.
“THIS SEASON (2016–2017) at the Finnish National Ballet more room than ever is being given over to Finnish choreography and music,” states Danish Artistic Director Kenneth Greve. “Our programme features eight works by Finnish choreographers.”

“We are celebrating 100 years of Finnish independence, and we want to draw in audiences with a diverse range of interests. To do this we have built up a programme with content ranging from traditional fairytales to Jorma Uotinen’s very Finnish piece, Jord, which has been choreographed for 12 men.”

The main body of the programme Greve has planned features three lines: a classic line, new family ballets and a contemporary line.

“Diversity is what I want to show,” he emphasises.

“I feel that the most important thing is that we are able to draw in young people and develop a new audience for ballet. If people feel represented on stage, they’re going to be leaning in.”

One example of a new kind of family piece for Finland’s anniversary year is choreographer Jorma Elo’s spectacular new interpretation of Alice in Wonderland, which will have its premier in October. Also returning to the programme is the popular ballet Moomin and the Comet (chor. Anandah Kononen, 2015) and Greve’s own choreography for The Snow Queen (2012), based on H.C. Andersen’s fairytale but well embedded in Finnish environments, which will also visit Copenhagen in January 2017.

Getting boys to come to the ballet is an important personal mission for Greve. “We have to create the kind of works that boys can also relate to,” Greve stresses. “This was something I paid particular attention to with The Snow Queen.”

“It’s a challenge for an étoile like Tiina Myllymäki to one day do Swanlake and the next day be a Moomin,” admits Greve. “But it is part of the dancers’ diversity. I want to maintain classical ballet at a very high level, but our dancers are also extremely versatile. One of the most exciting things is seeing them do something more contemporary.”

The opening piece for autumn 2016 will be Natalia Horensa’s modern take on the tale of Romeo and Juliet, which is sure to strike a chord with young people. Four Finnish contemporary choreographers will be creating their own works for the National Ballet’s dancers, and these will be performed on the big stage at the end of spring 2017 Susanna Leinonen, Virpi Pahkinen, Jyrki Karttunen and Jorma Uotinen all use Finnish classical or modern music, from Sibelius to Einojuhani Rautavaara and cello-rock group Apocalyptica.

The National Ballet’s programme gives a rounded impression of Finnishness, incorporating not just Moomins and heavy metal, but also The Seven Brothers, based on the first book written in Finnish by Aleksis Kivi (chor. Marjo Kuusela) and the dark tale of Kullervo, based on the national epic Kalevala (Tero Saarinen – Jean Sibelius).

“This in no way gives a complete picture. A major Finnish premier is on the way for autumn 2017, where we’ll be bringing together ballet, opera, choir and singers – unfortunately that’s as much as I can give away!” Greve states glowingly.

“We’ve done a lot of legwork, carrying out audience outreach programmes and making visits to different parts of Finland. Now we’re starting to reap the rewards from this: we’ve been successful in creating demand and have brought a new audience on board.”

“This spring the ballet has been performing to packed audiences,” Kenneth Greve is satisfied. “The ballet is really finding its place here now.”
ON THE BENCHES OF A BABYSAUNA

SOME TWENTY BABIES and toddlers are seated in the auditorium; they are watching intently a dance of colourful pails and a rhythmic swinging of bundles of dried birch branches. The gurgling of water, the hissing of the hot stove and the clattering of the stones on the stove are complemented by sauna-themed songs and an enchanting world of sound. The atmosphere is similar to any Finnish sauna, calm and sensuous.

After the performance, the small spectators will themselves have an opportunity to explore the water, the birch branches and the pails.

“The idea of a sauna as a starting point was inspiring because, apart from being artistically interesting, it constitutes a familiar and safe environment for babies to experience art. A Finnish sauna brings together all the elements that interest babies,” says Riikka Siirala, a dance artist who has choreographed and also performs the latest BabySauna production (2015) of Loiske Ensemble.

Loiske Ensemble was born in 2006 out of a desire to create artistic experiences and sensations for babies and toddlers. Siirala and her colleagues wanted to examine ways of communicating with babies through the medium of dance. She has also produced a thesis (2012) on the subject. In it, she concludes that dance performances for babies encourage interaction between baby and carer and enhance a baby’s overall communicativeness.

The BabySauna experience is aimed at babies aged 0–1 year and has toured all over Finland, including mother and baby homes, in which mothers who need help with their parenting skills learn to take control of their lives and to interact with their babies.

FINNISH-RUSSIAN collaborations in contemporary dance spring the occasional surprise.

Lost Voices of Humdrum, the first co-production funded by the programme called Finnish–Russian Dance Exchange, premiered in January 2016. It was a collaboration between Pori Dance Company of Finland and Bye Bye Ballet, a contemporary dance centre based at St Petersburg.

What counts as dance can vary significantly between the two countries. “Discussions after the show yielded interesting views about the performance and even the whole process. This gave rise to a variety of ideas, feelings and new relationships,” says Mikko Lampinen, artistic director of Pori Dance Company.

An entire festival, Skoro Finnish Dance, was devoted to contemporary Finnish dance in St Petersburg in December 2015.

HELSINKI WILL FINALLY GET A DANCEHOUSE

IN THE MIDDLE of a dismal European recession, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the city of Helsinki have decided to support the construction of a Dancehouse with a significant amount. A year ago, the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation granted the project an unprecedented subsidy of 15m Euros.

“The House will improve the status, visibility and accessibility of dance substantially,” says Sanna Rokola, Chair of the governing body of the project. The Dancehouse will form part of the Cable Factory, Helsinki’s largest cultural centre, which will receive an extension. According to Managing Director Hanni-Mari Peltomäki, the idea is not just about bricks and mortar: the intention is to create an active advocate for dance. The House will feature many different dance forms.

“‘The project represents a historic step in the development of Finnish dance,” says Education and Culture Minister Sanni Grahn-Laasonen. The House will be built in 2018–2019 and is expected to be open to the public in 2020. 4 SKX

NEW IMPULSES

MIKKO LAMPINEN: Lost Voices of Humdrum. PHOTO Asya Nurullina

“WE wanted to show the diversity of contemporary dance – the ways it can be defined in Finland,” artistic director Olesya Kazakova explains. “For our local audiences, some of the performances were not dance.” Indeed, many of the spectators stayed behind to discuss the meanings of the performances. Choreographer Sonja Jokiniemi, whose work Hirn was performed at the festival, stresses that such dialogue is important. “Understanding the work is not necessary,” she adds.

Maria and Igor Teplyakov had won tickets for the festival from the Finnish Institute of St Petersburg. They described the performances as strange – in a good way. “I would definitely come and see contemporary Finnish dance again. Life is sometimes so grey that new impulses are welcome,” says Maria Teplyakova.

FINNISH-DANCE IN FOCUS 2016–2017

The House will feature many different dance forms.
DANCING FINLAND 2017 – MAY WE HAVE THE HONOUR?

FINLAND WILL celebrate 100 years of independence as a nation in 2017. One of the ways the centenary will be celebrated is through dance. The ‘Dancing Finland’ campaign (Finnish title: ‘Koko Suomi tanssii’), coordinated by Dance Info Finland, will feature dance-related activities for people all over the world.

“The Dancing Finland programme will provide an easy, intriguing way to learn about dance and physicality. I’m certain that millions will get involved in dance through our campaign,” said project director Pirjetta Mulari.

Dancing Finland will get under way with a dance challenge. Anyone who wants to take part can learn the dance challenge choreography from an online video or a participating instructor. Participants then make a video of their own performance and upload it to social media.

“There are no limits to the dance challenge! It’s the ultimate way to unite diverse people and groups all over the world,” Pirjetta Mulari explained.

The dance challenge features choreographed routines from six different dance styles: ballet, street dance, ballroom and folk dance, show dance and an original choreographed piece accessible to everyone, regardless of ability. The choreographers who created the pieces are Akim Bakhtasov (street dance), Ida Jussomäki (show dance), Marina Tirkkonen (ballet), Panu Varstala (contemporary dance), Petri Kauppinen and Marjukka Koivunenimi (ballroom and folk dance) and Pia Lindy (original choreography).

Dancing Finland is a major campaign to raise the profile of the dance field. It represents a new direction for Dance Info Finland.

“In the past, Dance Info Finland focused on serving the professional dance community. It’s exciting to launch such a major awareness-raising campaign for the general public. Dance is a democratic art form everyone can get involved in, so it’s a great opportunity,” Mulari explained.

The dance challenge will get under way on 6 January 2017 *in*
PARTANEN’S WORKS are often the creations of intimate working groups, but in Fields of Glory, which premiered last year, he directed 50 amateur performers using a sports field in Helsinki as their stage. The concept of the piece is a fictional sports event and its opening ceremony. The idea is a long jump into a futuristic period in which community celebrations replace competition between people.

The premiere of Fields of Glory was a major collaboration between Zodiak – Center for New Dance, Finland’s Slot Machine Association (RAY) and Helsinki Festival, as well as being part of the 10th anniversary of Zodiak’s award-winning community outreach programme. Partanen, who has instructed Zodiak’s male dance and choreography courses, was commissioned to undertake a community outreach programme for male participants. Fields of Glory was subtitled as a sports event that bids farewell to heroism.

“The primary aim was not to create an empowering community dance work, but rather to make a piece on my own terms. I wanted manliness to be separated from biological sex. Anyone who wanted to be could be involved. We didn’t ask about the participants’ backgrounds, only what their motivation was for taking part. I was pleased to have a completely heterogeneous group of performers for our premiere. The youngest was 20 years old, whilst the oldest were closer to 70 – the performance featured men of all backgrounds, from fashion designers to a retired officer, and even businessmen and lawyers”, states Partanen.

Normally, sports fields are home to those competing for victory and superiority, but those stepping into this arena do so to put themselves on the line. The deliberately pompous setting balanced out the performers’ innately modest movements. Years ago, Partanen had discussed the idea of staging a piece on a sports field with his trusted working group: scenographer Samuli Laine and sound designer Jussi Matikainen.

Jarkko Partanen is a Helsinki-based choreographer whose work intertwines tightly-involved group work, eroticising playfulness and impressive concepts.
“To me, sports fields have always been the stage of powerful, muscular, good-looking and capable people. And the stages of bodies – whether the events arena was ideological or athletic. This time we wanted to get things going by giving the field to people who could step up, complete with their own strengths and weaknesses.”

In the performance the sports event imagery and the patterns are repeated and then enriched with deceptive cracks, whereby the piece alienates the viewer from images familiar to them. The piece demonstrates that the spectacle format is not, in itself, a form of monstrous mass media, but rather a means of communication which can have an exceptionally sensitising effect, and which can be complemented with critical values. Fields of Glory hijacks the great sense of uniqueness provided by the magnificent setting for its own purposes.

The choreography provides an abundance of space in which the performers can be their true selves. It asks the participants to perform as little as possible, and on the contrary, gently encourages them to act in synchronised unity. The result is an arena full of individuals, with the differences between them fading, appealing to the audience with their sincerity. The performers radiate a genuine sense of unity and tranquility, and they exude an enthusiasm about experiencing themselves on the brink of something new, together with each other.

“I've done plenty of participatory work with collectives such as the Reality Research Center. Perhaps that was what gave me my sensitivity for reading people, which is something that comes in very useful in group situations. My own work is at its best when I create safe working environments; where people dare to surrender and give something of themselves. When there are no biases about how things should be, people can throw themselves into experimentations that are truly their own.”

In what Partanen does there is a strong desire to assemble groups of different kinds of people to savour the sense of togetherness. Over the last years Partanen has created the By the Pool concept events in which people of different backgrounds were invited to a swimming pool alongside the working group. The warm pool has provided a unifying oasis in the midst of Finland’s mentally and physically numbing winter. The event series began a year ago with the Side Step Festival at Zodiak, where artist interviews were carried out in the pool with the Gob Squad and Hodworks working groups. This winter the concept broadened into a performance featuring as a guest performer, choreographeranssonEllina Pirinen.

“I started to develop an event around the swimming pool, an event which would melt bodily freezing and where things would be physically different. I thought that different kinds of people, politicians, activists, dancers could be invited to the pool. I wanted to create a project that doesn’t inevitably start to diminish into one end point, one final outcome.”

In the new instalment of By the Pool the whole audience will be in the pool. There will be no real performers; instead the performance will be led by two recordings, one under the surface, one on it.”

Summer 2016 Partanen was also involved in the Wonderlust sex festival, which was held for the third time, and in its own words, celebrates diverse and conscious sexuality. Partanen’s previous performances have been – without exception – very
A sports field is inevitably also a political arena.

In March 2015 the Zodiac Center for New Dance, Education and Outreach, Katja Kirsi, received the State Prize for Dance for her ten years of work developing audience outreach at Zodiac. Kirsi has created a model for audience engagement in contemporary dance, whereby courses and community projects are run not by separate outreach workers, but by the artists themselves.

"It increases the volume of audience engagement and the work isn’t focused on the individual. With audience outreach it’s not a case of marketing art either, instead it more closely resembles the artistic work that the artists do, and which they are interested in. The artists themselves decide what they want to do,” says Katja Kirsi.

Zodiac’s audience outreach courses are not focused on pedagogy or techniques.

"Putting art first in audience engagement makes it possible to share the artist’s world with participants, and vice versa. Anyone can get involved in making art and the experience of dance, and play an active role themselves. The kind of encounters an artist can offer through their work are unique, as is the use of movement to open up routes into not only art but also a person’s own life.”

A third of those coming to watch Zodiac’s performances found their way into the audiences through outreach work. Katja Kirsi also has a background in art education. “Contemporary dance is a fairly young form of dance in Finland, and when it comes to big audiences they don’t know much about the aesthetics of contemporary dance. This shows that contemporary dance does not yet have such a strong presence in society, which leaves room for art education work.”

One of Zodiac’s audience outreach projects is the My Name Is project, which, led by Jenni Koistinen, has been running for a number of years in Helsinki’s suburbs. To her, this community-centric participatory art created with non-professionals is a way to put down roots in real life, to exist in the world and society. "The art scene is quick to form its own bubble, cut off from the outside world. I feel that this is a fruitful way to make art, involving different people and places in the creation process. For me it’s a means to stay in touch with what is happening in the world and what people are thinking,” she explains.

This year’s themes are the environment, power and identity, and in addition to the workshops and performances, a community garden has been established in Kannelmäki, one of the Helsinki suburbs involved in the project. For those who have already been involved in several My Name Is workshops or performances, a mentoring programme has been set up, where participants can realise their own art projects.

"From an artistic perspective their plans are high-quality and ambitious. It’s fantastic to see that when people are given the opportunities, art begins to come alive and bring a new kind of life to a neighbourhood,” says Jenni Koistinen.

Anne Harju, a Kannelmäki resident, has been involved in a number of the My Name Is project’s community dance workshops and performances. She is delighted that keeping up with art and culture doesn’t necessarily require a trip into the city centre. At the workshops of the My Name Is project, work with movement marked the discovery of a connection between movement, thoughts and emotions for Harju. At the moment she is working on her own dance piece, set in the forest, in collaboration with three others from Kannelmäki.

Creative work in public spaces creates a new kind of relationship with the neighbourhood a person lives in, and with its residents. “Perhaps we’ve given the people of Kannelmäki an example of what you can do – maybe we’ve provoked something too – and they have reacted to us. Through art, interaction with other residents goes beyond normal everyday contact.”

PUTTING ART FIRST IN AUDIENCE OUTREACH

TEXT: Mari Fehteenen

In March 2015 the Zodiac Center for New Dance, Education and Outreach, Katja Kirsi, received the State Prize for Dance for her ten years of work developing audience outreach at Zodiac. Kirsi has created a model for audience engagement in contemporary dance, whereby courses and community projects are run not by separate outreach workers, but by the artists themselves.

"There’s a lot of good in Flashdance’s core, and it suggests an arena – it’s important that events don’t, in fact, stay being just an outreaching event. Much can be achieved through a bubble, cut off from the outside world. I feel that this is a fruitful way to make art, involving different people and places in the creation process. For me it’s a means to stay in touch with what is happening in the world and what people are thinking," she explains.

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Writer is the editor of Liikkeiksi.com – an online publication specialising in dance.

Direct quote: "A sports field is inevitably also a political arena."
MEET THE NEW FACES!

Four young Finnish choreographers - Milla Koistinen, Jaakko Nieminen, Milla Virtanen and Sonja Jokiniemi - talk about being alert and curious, challenging common codes and languages, and of course, about their art.

FINDING MY OWN CHOREOGRAPHY
- MILLA KOISTINEN

Having graduated as a dancer from the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, Milla Koistinen found herself going back and forth between Kuopio and Salzburg, and Reykjavik and Dusseldorf, in her roles as a choreographer, dancer and teacher. Nowadays Koistinen calls Berlin home, after having worked in Brussels from 2004 to 2010. More was asked of dancers there, in terms of producing their own material, which perhaps distinguished it from the way things were usually done in Helsinki at the time. However, since having studied to become a choreographer in Berlin, Koistinen has found her own choreography.

"I watched a lot of theatre and challenged myself to create more conceptual choreography. For a while motion had to be torn down and got rid of, but now it's making its way back into my pieces," Milla Koistinen explains. Felse (2013), which was created in collaboration with the brilliant actor Elmar Bäck, Rasmus Steel and Lidia Bäck from the theatre group Nya Ramper, brought text and language into the works more openly than before.

Koistinen’s works are often based on subtexts which rock the audience, with the unfurling of these elements proving not only rewarding but also giving free rein to turn the gaze back on the audience themselves. Koistinen often finds starting points for her works in literature and fine art. For her series of pieces in spring 2016 inspiration came from the American abstract expressionist, Agnes Martin, focusing on her absoluteness. Martin’s paintings and impressions are based on endless repetition and deal with experiences of happiness, beauty and innocence.

"The path I’ve travelled searching for my identity as a dancer and choreographer feels peculiar, but in a good way. If 10 years ago I’d have seen the works that I’ve now created as a choreographer, I’d probably have told you that there was no way would happen. It’s a good reminder that you can end up doing absolutely anything. When you don’t know where you’ll be in 10 years’ time, it keeps you alert and curious."
PEELING BACK THE LAYERS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR – MILLA VIRTANEN

Dancer-choreographer Millä Virtanen, together with Jaakko Toivonen, has choreographed a new piece entitled Blackpool, which premiered in June 2016 and is based on both contemporary dance artists’ backgrounds in ballroom dance and the world of competition. The eminent dance sport competition held in Blackpool is, according to Virtanen, a special and exciting world of its own, where glamour, brutality and hierarchies create a cut-throat atmosphere.

“The piece is a self-ironic look – created with a great deal of love – at what is under the ballroom dance’s surface,” I’m interested in people’s behaviour. The kinds of hierarchies found in dance sport are, of course, also easy to spot in the world of contemporary dance. The themes of the piece are universal”, says Millä Virtanen.

Virtanen has learnt to cherish and value the experiences she gained from her time in dance sport as a source of richness. “It has fine-tuned my muscles and nervous system giving me a unique form. There’s no shortage speed and contact with your co-performer in ballroom dances. At the same time, I’ve learnt not only to relax but also about scope, through a range of works produced by dancers and through choreographic studies”, says Virtanen.

In Virtanen’s dance theatre strong female characters, grittiness, and putting herself on the line are important elements. Cooperation spanning numerous different forms of art, with media artist Leevi Lehtinen and musician-sound designer Anssi Lahkonen, has been steadily evolving over the course of a number of projects.

Millä Virtanen hopes that dance tour networks will continue to develop in the future, both in Finland and in Europe. “A major change is required here, so that artists don’t necessarily need to be producing new pieces all the time. It would be great if pieces of art could – thanks to longer life cycles – be allowed to grow and resonate with different kinds of audiences.”

AGAINST CAPTURE AND NORMS, IN FAVOUR OF BARENESS – SONJA JOKINIEMI

Jokiniemi’s solo works open particular and unique worlds. In the artist’s own words, they explore “existential questions, the processes of conceptualization and frail experiences of life in today’s fragmented reality.” An interest in visual art, and in exploring objects, different kinds of language systems and diversity can be seen in her works.

The artist, who works all around Europe, graduated with a Master’s degree in theatre arts from the DAS Theatre programme at Amsterdam University of the Arts’ Theatre School. The multidisciplinary study environment influenced her own forms of expression:

“Through experimentation I grew interested in miniature forms, playfulness and inanimate objects: how we become sensitised to a space and see human characteristics in objects too.”

The piece OH-NO! (2015) followed two pens’ encounters with a gust from the objects level. The limited space grew larger and the pens became sticks in fém (2015), which exposed sounds, meanings and existence.

“I communicate with the audience through my works. The pieces pose questions and give viewers room to immerse themselves in their own interpretations, thoughts and associations.”

Jokiniemi has also worked with special groups, such as those featuring individuals on the autistic spectrum.

“I want to present different ways of communication and existence, and challenge what are perceived to be common codes and languages.”

Her newest piece, RRRRR (2016) continues her exploration of language systems – and looks at the schizophrenic nature of the times we live in: devidedness and fragmentation in a world where success plays a central role.

“Diversity, challenging physical-political and psychological norms, and fragility are all ‘concepts that speak to me’, says dance and performance artist Sonja Jokiniemi.
SUSANNA LEINONEN rose to international prominence among Finnish choreographers with her work Ei kukaan, vain ystäväsi (No one, Just Your Friend) in the year 2000, the same year that she graduated with a Master’s in dance. The following year she founded her own group, the Susanna Leinonen Company, whose works have been performed in more than 20 countries. Leinonen has also worked as a guest choreographer with such groups as the Finnish National Ballet, the Royal Swedish Ballet, and the Danish Dance Theater. In 2010 she was a nominee for the Prix Benois de la Danse.

Her company is celebrating 15 years in existence, so this year is a full one. In March 2016 the group made an extensive tour of Sweden as part of Dancenet Sweden, with Tre, a work by the director of the dance company of Stockholm City Theater, Kenneth Kvanström. The tour included Leinonen’s most recent work, SEE | OBEY.

“The Düsseldorf Tanzmesse is coming up in the fall. We’ll be bringing scenes from SEE | OBEY to the Open Studio, and performing material from an upcoming work.”

Choreographer Susanna Leinonen is a forceful creator with a distinct voice. Her works are characterized by a scrupulously polished unity and an ability to meld the technique of classical ballet with the expression of contemporary dance. Leinonen’s most recent work, SEE | OBEY, touches a current nerve more strongly than even she anticipated in the process of creating it.

BENEATH THE POLISHED SURFACE, A FRACTURED WORLD UNFOLDS

TEXT Raisa Heikuma

Dancer: Misa Lommi Heikki Tuuli

The dancers Sanni Giordani and Misa and Natasha Lommi absolutely hypnotize the viewer with their work in the piece.
THE POWER OF OPPOSITES

Compactness and nebulous sensuality are imaginative opposites. These words together describe the deep-diving, separate world below the surface through which the audience is led in Leinonen’s choreography. The virtuosically polished surface is seamlessly interwoven with the free-flowing universe of the unconscious. Dark-toned frameworks stripped of ornamentation make the movements shine as the dancers perform a flawless, closely intertwined continuum of motion that demands the use of the entire body.

Leinonen’s newest piece, SEE | OBEY, received an enthusiastic reception in the fall of 2015. Turun Sanomat newspaper’s reviewer called it “…an experience that caresses the senses and stimulates the mind. The thematically dense, interdisciplinary narrative seems to combine, among other things, the absurdity of life, the experience of time, and the feeling of travel.” In fall of 2016 the piece will be presented in a festival gala at Almi Hall at the Finnish National Opera, where the company will also perform excerpts from choreographic works of the past 15 years.

SEE | OBEY is a cryptic title. “It refers to two things – watching and acquiescing. Do we accept everything we see? Should we intervene in the horrors and violence we see? What do we accept automatically and what should we accept? What is the mould that we’re raised to conform to? Instead of acquiescing, should we question everything?” Leinonen muses. “The word pairing of see and obey also pleases me. It fits into a small space, just like the dancers who squeeze onto a little stool to dance.”

“WHAT IS THE MOLD THAT WE’RE RAISED TO CONFORM TO? INSTEAD OF ACQUIESCING, SHOULD WE QUESTION EVERYTHING?”

TIED TO ITS TIME

The opening night of SEE | OBEY in the fall of 2015 happened to be at a moment that shocked the world. The day before the premiere there was a massive suicide attack in Paris in which a great number of innocent people died. A section of the text for the piece begins with an actor describing a patient of Jung’s who was afraid to go to Paris, and died as soon as he arrived there. The work also spoke of bombs, fear of flying, and death.

That same fall, floods of refugees were growing uncontrollably and masses of people were packed into refugee centers around Europe, in an atmosphere strained by a fear of terrorism. The performance began with a film by Jouka Valkama that ended with the texts: “Do you hear the bomb’s explosion and Death will come before the credits.” During the creation stage, we couldn’t have imagined how closely our material would track with reality, because we worked on it slowly, in collaboration with composer Kasperi Laine. I’ve learned that it takes time for the right decisions to come to fruition.”

MORE KINDNESS

Lightness, a gentler take on the movement material, and even humor are new flavors in Leinonen’s signature choreographic style. “I’m trying to be less my own worst enemy. I used to reject ideas immediately, in the rehearsal phase, even when they might have grown into something with patience. Now I don’t want to be in such safe waters, I want to let ideas bloom. I haven’t lost my ambition, but my compulsiveness has eased up.”

The multidisciplinary SEE | OBEY opens a new facet, because it combines film, spoken word, and music with the dance.
The multidisciplinary SEE | OBEY opens a new facet, because it combines film, spoken word, and music with the dance. “I wanted to include new artists like a poet, writer Jukka Viikilä, and professional actors.”

“In the past, I would have strictly controlled everything, but now I have to let the other artists work in peace.” Loosening the reins was freeing for Leinonen, but also frightening. “When I was waiting for the text, I was scared. What if the elements didn’t work together? Did I have enough ability to integrate them? There was so much material that the responsibility of finding the right creative solutions terrified me.” Leinonen thanks her trusted team for the success of the result, including composer and rap artist Kasperi Laine, costume designer Erika Turunen, filmmaker Jouka Valkama, and her lead dancers.

In rehearsal, Leinonen is short-spoken. The themes of her pieces are often personal, but the audience doesn’t need to know where they come from. “The viewer can form their own interpretation of the work. And the dancers also have to be given the freedom of their own interpretation, otherwise the multidimensionality narrows and the final result falls flat.”

For the first two weeks Leinonen rehearses the dancers on a work’s repertoire of movement. Practicing movement phrases and incorporating the dancers she is directing firmly into the world of the piece, where the dancers, too, have a clear understanding of the goal of the work. “There has to be time to experiment with the movement and improvise, because often even just clowning around you find an answer. But when I was sawing a stool down to make it shorter and shorter, the dancers eventually said, That’s enough; any lower and they wouldn’t be able to get up.”

A DEMANDING JOB
Fifteen years is an achievement in a field with scarce resources. Together with managing director Katri Kekäläinen, Leinonen works full time outside the rehearsal room thinking of new funding opportunities and searching for new collaboration partners, including internationally.

When I ask her what else makes up a choreographer’s day, Leinonen says: “My whole family has been recruited into various projects and we do a lot of things together.”
Jouka Valkama

A SLOWED OF THE POWER

"I’ve always been interested in how film techniques can be made to serve as content for a movement piece. I started making videos and short films as a hobby when I was just 12,” says SEE | OBEY filmmaker Jouka Valkama, a ballet dancer with the National Opera.

Valkama reminisced about the early days of his hobby, when he made short films shot in chronological order. “I had to leave a hundredth of a second of blank space between shots in case I wanted to edit in additional footage. Now there are computer-based editing tools within anybody’s reach that are constantly developing, and the possibilities for computer graphics are better and better.”

In addition to Leinonen’s works, Valkama’s video projections have been seen in the Finnish National Ballet productions of Swan Lake and The Little Mermaid, whose 3-D animation technique took stage narrative to a new level.

"Valkama’s video projections have been seen in the Finnish National Ballet productions of Swan Lake and The Little Mermaid, whose 3-D animation technique took stage narrative to a new level."

"I’ve created video material for my pieces with Jouka before, but this time I wanted to come up with our first dance film that could be presented as its own complete work or as a part of the SEE | OBEY performance. The process was so interesting that we’re going to continue making dance films in the future. We already have another screenplay written."

"It’s a pleasure to watch the purity of movement,” says Leinonen. The dancers Sanni Giordani and Misa and Natasha Lommi absolutely hypnotize the viewer with their work in the piece.

In spring of 2017 Leinonen will direct the dancers of the Finnish National Ballet in her work Breaking the Fury. At the same time, she will be working on a new piece for her own company, which will premiere in fall of 2017. For the new piece, Leinonen is using old materials to create something new, going through her own stores of both costumes and sets and repurposing them. “We recycle nearly everything, including our music and movement material, in the process of creating a completely new work. A theme of our movement vocabulary is motion that rewinds. In the process of rehearsal for almost every piece, we’ve played with rewinding movement phrases. Now we’re going to get to realize that dream.”


"My attempt was not just to record dance but to use moving pictures to take dance narrative to a new level. And sometimes the simpler a movement is the better it looks in an image.” Valkama says he is retiring from dancing in four years. “That way I can concentrate on making movies. My self-confidence has grown with the doing, and I already know that I can take good-looking images, but combining elements still has plenty of challenges.”
Six years ago, choreographer and dancer Thomas Freundlich found himself, to his surprise, shooting and directing a dance film. Now he is one of the leading dance filmmakers in Finland. What made a dance artist a filmmaker, whose newest works, including Cold Storage, can be found in 4K format, which is still rare internationally?

FREUNDLICH’S FIRST short film, North Horizon (2010), made with dancer-choreographer Valtteri Raekallio, got its start almost by accident. When a live performance planned in Spitsbergen fell through due to a scheduling issue, the two artists had to change their plans at short notice. One evening in Spitsbergen, the pair stumbled out of their tent, walked into the tundra, and began filming each other improvising in the arctic landscape.

“Amazingly enough, it turned out to be a coherent piece that seemed to resonate with viewers. Now the film’s been shown at 25 festivals around the world, and there’s still a lot of interest in it.”

Thomas Freundlich decided to study the art and technique of filmmaking in earnest. The 41-year-old artist has already found the time to make 12 short dance films, dozens of recorded dance works, documentaries and trailers, along with his own choreography. These days dance films take up the largest part of his days.
Dance isn’t exactly the easiest thing to film. In every project, there are so many new things to learn. It’s been an advantage that I come from a dance background – I already speak the same language. I have certainly had fun with this tool, this form.

3D AND BEING PRESENT

Last year Freundlich created no less than two dance short films that made use of the newest technologies, 3D and 4K. The three-dimensional perspective offered by 3D pulled Freundlich in when he saw the Wim Wenders film Pina (2011) on the big screen.

"Pina is the ultimate proof of how 3D can bring out the presence of the human body in a way that a traditional 2D movie or video can’t. It can help convey the essence of a dance work, which often dies in the camera lens or on the screen, to a different degree. The greatest experience for me was what the film did for Pina Bausch’s live performances."

He decided he had to get into 3D for his own work. Freundlich’s short 3D film The Raven (2015) recorded Kaari and Roni Martin’s contemporary flamenco solo Korppi ja kello, which has won prizes from here to Spain, in breathtaking style. It was also the first Finnish 3D dance film. In fact, 3D is still relatively rare in dance film worldwide. In a 3D film, making the viewer feel almost thrust into the action is, according to Freundlich, largely dependent on working with a team that specializes in 3D. For The Raven, stereographer Jarmo Honkala was responsible for realizing the direction of Tuisku McLees.

"3D is a demanding medium – maybe eight times more complicated than 2D – and it has a lot of technical, optical, and physiological requirements connected with it."

"You have to plan precisely how much three-dimensionality and depth you want to bring into the picture so that the effect works. With 3D, there’s zero tolerance for error. If everything isn’t technically flawless, in the worst cases the viewer can get a terrible headache. The equipment setups can also get extremely complicated and costly when shooting 3D, but there is great potential in the medium for dance."

4K AND SUPER-PRECISION

Last year the multi-talented Freundlich also shot and directed the short film Subsurface using 4K technology. The visually stunning, polished choreography in the film was done by Katja Roukkula and Jussi Väisänen, winners of numerous international dance competitions. In 4K films, the pixel count of the image is four times greater than in today’s high definition. For Freundlich, however, the tool is not the primary thing.

"Filmmakers still have to put the content and the visual ideas first. With the highest projector resolution you can give the image a new high fidelity and super-precision, but then the material has to have a lot of visual detail and texture at the micro level."

From 2012 to 2014, Freundlich worked with Valtteri Raekallio as artistic director of Loikka Dance Film Festival and later also as coordinator of the festival’s 3D and 4K films. He still watches an impressive number of dance films and is amazed at the high technical level of today’s dance films. We are well past the days when dance film work meant swaying around in a rehearsal studio with a camcorder.

"The democratization of tools has made it possible for dance practitioners to begin learning and embracing the techniques of motion imaging in their own work, but dancers and choreographers are also increasingly seeking out collaborations with professional filmmakers. You can definitely see both of those things going on. The biggest question when you watch a lot of dance movies is where is the ‘meat’ of the dance itself, the cinematic angle, or that one great idea, presented in a format of just a few minutes. Technology can’t answer those questions."

The greatest challenge, he says, is conveying the essence of dance and capturing it so that it speaks in a way other than just as a pretty picture.

"The best Finnish dance films are now impressive to watch even by international standards. If only the funding models and infrastructure can be established, Freundlich thinks that Finnish dance films will have no problem reaching a global audience. ‘There’s been an terrific grass-roots scene for up and coming dance filmmakers, thanks to the Loikka festival. In the last couple of years, we have already seen a number of high-quality, well-organized productions here, even if there isn’t a massive amount of money.’"
**Powerful dance movements, original camera angles, and a narrative that runs from the humorous to the tragic combine deliciously.**

**COLD STORAGE**

Freundlich and Raekallio’s years of intensive learning can be seen beautifully in their newest creation, Cold Storage, which was completed last spring. Powerful dance movements, original camera angles, and a narrative that runs from the humorous to the tragic combine deliciously and quickly draw the viewer in. The profound, tightly narrate story of a lone ice fisherman’s longing for friendship is a departure from the pair’s earlier choreographed dancing at all. In the new piece they wanted to also bring to the forefront the physical virtuosity and movement finesse of the performers. The self-imposed rule was to not cut Raekallio’s choreographed dancing at all.

“Yes, our philosophy of filming dance is straight out of Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly – a wide angle, long shots, and controlled camera movement. Particularly in the central dance sequence of the film, the shooting style was that of the golden age of musicals, although the goal isn’t to look like them on the screen, of course.”

“Maybe I’m getting middle-aged, but more and more I feel the attraction of continuous dance movement and a wide angle. I don’t know why it has been so unfashionable for the past fifty years.”

For Cold Storage, the duo and their working group received a 40,000 euro production grant, the first ever awarded by Loikka festival, the Finnish Film Foundation, and Finnish public broadcasting company Yle. “It’s clear that without this production budget, we wouldn’t have been able to make the film in this form. Of course, we also tried to make the movie look like it was made with an even bigger budget. When you come to film work from the contemporary dance scene, you definitely learn to make things happen using limited resources!”

Writer is journalist and art critic.

In April, Loikka, the largest dance film festival in the Nordic countries, now in its tenth year, presented an impressive number of dance films from Australia to Vietnam. This year 77 films were shown. Of the 29 Finnish films entered for consideration, 18 were chosen for the festival, five of them premiering there. There were 164 entries altogether.

“I don’t remember ever having such a broad range of Finnish offerings, although we did have a lot last year. I’m extremely happy at the high level of dance film being made in Finland today,” enthused festival artistic director Kati Kallio.

What does Kallio feel the strong level of Finnish dance film stems from?

“I would certainly wave our own flag quite vigorously. The festival, founded by the group M.A.D., has worked with all their might for almost ten years to raise the awareness of the audience, the artists, and the funders of Finnish dance film. The workshops tailored for professionals and other fusions of the fields of dance and filmmaking over the years are now bearing fruit.”

According to Kallio, this can be seen strongly in the last four years.

“The level of the films has risen in particular in the level of form. Films made in the north are precise, cool, polished, and there is demand for that in other parts of the world.”

Kallio says that international interest is growing all the time. The touring program that kicks off after the festival will consist almost entirely of Finnish programming.

This year’s tour will offer Thomas Freundlich and Valtteri Raekallio’s breathtaking Cold Storage and the crystalline harmony of Jouka Valkama’s SEE I OBEY, based on Susanna Leinonen’s acclaimed dance piece. Also included are the mythic Fallin, directed by Mika Tertsunen and choreographed by Annuautti Saine, and the international prizewinner Body Language Zone, directed by Kim Saarinen and choreographed by Johanna Reimann. In the new artist series are Ylva Tihila and Sami Hokkanen’s co-directed Contiguity.

Kallio says that the production funding that started last year for one of the films presented at the festival has also inspired dance artists to try their wings as filmmakers. The production funding this year, for example, which has now grown to 50,000 euros, went to the trio of Anna Maria Joakimsdottir Nutri, Maria Saivosalmi and Andreius Katinas, whose work in this field Kallio hasn’t seen before. Kallio sees the future of Finnish dance film as a bright one, because the artists of the younger generation are rapidly beginning to take interest.

“It would be important for dance students who are still in school to also be able to practice this wonderful art form, which can reach a huge number of people and offer a level of storytelling that’s really all its own.”

In addition to scraping up enough funds, the greatest challenge in Finland is remunerative distribution. Public broadcasting is the only venue that can offer nationwide distribution.
REETTA-KAISA ILES (b. 1976), a dance artist, is known as an all-rounder with roots in folkdance and is hard to pigeonhole. Iles is a multitalented practitioner of contemporary art and her creativity bursts in many different directions: from improvisation to underground, dance theatre, electronic music and folkdance. She doesn’t conform to the conventions of folkdance any better than Pippi Longstocking conforms to traditional books of fairies and princesses aimed at little girls.

Iles runs Tsuumi Dance Theatre, a Helsinki-based professional company, jointly with Tuomas Juntunen, a dancer and musician. Tsuumi creates two or three new productions every year and participates in joint productions with different groups and theatres. The artistic roots of the company are to be found in folk tradition, while it derives its themes and inspiration from modern society. The arcane resonates with the modern in its activities.

And no way is Reetta-Kaia Iles herself the kind of artist who, on making one discovery, concludes: “that’s it, then”. Iles sees through genre boundaries as if they didn’t exist. In addition to solid professional competence, this way of working requires sensitivity, a good eye, a sense of humour and a capacity for self-irony.

Collegiality and a multiplicity of art forms constitute the cornerstones of Iles’ way of working. “I’ve got no particular interest in Finnish folk art, though people often think that. My interests are more comprehensive, more global in their range,” she clarifies. “You’ve got to recognise traditions born out of different communities. Think of the dervishes, the Karelians, Latin dances, or any dance form, and you’ll find some fundamental, unifying factors: rhythm, pulse, simplicity, repetitiveness. Corporeality is at its core.”

“My starting points are: an interest in...
people, intimacy, humanity, imperfection and our powerful need to find another person and a group to belong to,” she says. “I rely heavily on improvisation as a tool. As a choreographer I rarely finalise the dance movements. The end result is invariably coloured strongly by the interpretation of the performers.”

Through improvisation, Iles aims to get hold of a performer’s idiosyncrasies, habits and individual ways of existing in this world. “The combinations discovered in this way yield something new consistently.”

Iles’ latest choreography Quiet Emotions is a good example. She picked four Finnish contemporary dancers for the social dance context with careers dating back decades: Marjo Kuusela, Ervi Siren, Alpo Aaltonen and Reijo Kela.

“As a person gets a bit older, his or her essence is clarified, which is brilliant. Everything superfluous vanishes. These four dancers are all strong individuals who stand on their own two feet.” Iles wants to show people on stage as fragile, naked, imperfect, naive, stupid, even abashed. As human beings. “In my works I aim to give the spectators the impression that anyone could him- or herself step onto the stage. Be one of the dancers.”

When one tries to describe what kind of art Iles creates, terminological definitions don’t seem to fit or be comprehensive enough. Her lively activism is reminiscent of Ganesha, the Hindu goddess with four hands, who stands for intelligence and good luck – in Iles’ case, for a visionary and joyous experience for the spectators. “I’m a mum juggling with my different roles, trying desperately to create art,” Iles says and laughs. “I define my work identity is an all-rounder of performing arts. Dance seems to be too narrow a definition to describe my work.”

Reetta-Kaisa Iles’ energy and electricity are reflected in the names of her artistic projects and works. She and Anne-Mari Kivimäki, an accordionist, form a duo called Puhti (the word means ‘vom’ or ‘vigor’). Puhti owns a club called Perkele! (damn it!). In addition, Iles also sings and dances in a group called Suistamon Sähkö (Suistamo Electricity).

The idea of Puhti is to create a new form of performance art by combining high-quality folk music and folkdance. The duo’s unique sound is created by the use of accordions, vocals and rhythmic stomping. And there’s no shortage of attitude: the two women perform on tables in a bar or at a big festival venue with equal boldness. Works in Puhti’s repertoire include Women and Bags, which explores role models and taboos; Love and Devotion, a multi-art concert based on Kalevala, the Finnish national epic; The Kantele Person, a mini-cabaret which is based on Finnish folklore and looks at Finland’s cultural heritage from a female point of view. A recording by Puhti will come out in Germany in summer 2016 and the duo will be performing at German venues throughout the year.

“Contemporary folk dance is a concept invented by someone at some stage. I have an unusual relationship with it. I find myself creating productions of many different kinds. Some of them may well be examples of contemporary folk dance. With Puhti, I often use the definition ‘music theatre.’ With Tsuumi, with communality as the starting point, the productions tend more towards ‘dance theatre.’

Ultimately, Iles’ art is about the interaction between people and social cohesion. “I’ve always associated singing with movement. Or if not singing, some kind of vocalisation. They’re inseparable. We form a circle, execute the same movement, find a way of communicating without words with another human being. It’s a fundamental need of ours and an element that creates a sense of security.”

Folk tradition carries brashness and impudence with it. In those circles everyone sings in his or her own voice. “The more imperfection I see on stage, the more touching I find it. It’s interesting to toy with a sense of shame. Maybe it’s because I’ve carried the burden of unsexy folk-dancing on my shoulders. The present world around us seems to amount to a display of eyelashes, buttocks and tits. People are trying to mould themselves and be successful.”

“An international career?” Iles pauses to think. “I’ve started building one in small Karelian villages in Russia by performing to local grannies.”

Writer is the arts editor of the Kaleva news
DIRECTORY OF FINNISH DANCE

This directory offers an overview of the Finnish dance field. It lists dance companies, production centres and regional dance centres as well as festivals and venues. Discover more about Finnish dance, choreographers and education at www.danceinfo.fi

DANCE COMPANIES

DANCE COMPANIES WITHIN ARTISTIC INSTITUTIONS

FINNISH NATIONAL BALLET
Helsinki
Contact:
Sampo Kivelä, artistic administrator
Artistic Director: Kenneth Greve
www.operaoneitalia.com
About 80 performances and 3–5 premiers per season. Also works with contemporary choreographers, such as Tero Saarinen, Jorma Elo, Jiri Kylian, John Neumeier, Alexei Ratmansky and Ohad Naharin. The Ballet employs 77 dancers representing 21 nationalities, plus 15 dancers in its Youth Company.
Genres: classical ballet, contemporary ballet, contemporary dance, young audiences

HELSINKI DANCE COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact:
Jyrki Karttunen, artistic director
www.hdc.fi
The biggest contemporary dance company in Finland with 12 dancers. HDC performers are known for performing physically demanding contemporary dance as well as expressive dance theatre. Helsinki Dance Company’s home is the Helsinki City Theatre.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre

PUBLICLY FUNDED DANCE COMPANIES

AB DANCE COMPANY / AURINKOBALETTI
Turku
Contact:
Katja Lehmannsaa, managing director & Urmas Poolamets, artistic director
www.aurinkobaletti.com
AB is known as a constantly evolving, high-quality contemporary dance group which is not afraid to venture outside the limits of its own genre. Its repertoire includes productions for both adults and children by Finnish and international choreographers. The home stage of the company is at Manilla, a beautifully restored former factory on the banks of the Aura River in Turku.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performances for children

DANCE THEATER ERI
Turku
Contact: Maarit Keto-Seppälä, producer
www.eri.fi
Dancer-choreographers Tiina Lindfors, Lassi Sairela and Eeva Soin founded Dance Theater ERI in 1989. Over the past 25 years ERI has built up a repertoire that now includes more than 300 works. Every year they produce around 130 performances, of which four or five are premiers.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre

DANCE THEATER HURJARUUTH
Helsinki
Contact: Anja Petterson, director
www.hurjaruuth.fi
With a history spanning 30 years and more than 100 productions, Hurjaruuth integrates contemporary dance with circus artists, musicians, writers and visual artists. Hurjaruuth’s annual Winter Circus thrills audiences with its aerial stunts, juggling and eye-boggling entertainment – each year’s show is a completely new creation.
Genres: Dance theatre, performances for children and young audiences
DANCE THEATRE MINIMI
Kiupio
Contact: Jupe Pohjolainen, managing director
www.minimi.fi
Minimi Dance both in Finland and abroad: on its home stage and on tour, in traditional stages and on the streets. Minimi wants to sustain and develop the mobility and availability of dance theatre and create performances in which dance and theatre merge into one.
Genres: Dance theatre, physical theatre, street theatre

DANCE THEATRE RAIKIKKO
Vantaa
Contact: Marja Korhola, artistic director
www.raatikko.fi
Founded in 1972, Raatikko has its own venue in Vantaa and also performs on tour. Raatikko creates dance pieces for children, young people and adults, often combining dance, theatre and circus.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performances for young audiences

DANCE THEATRE RIMPPAREMMI
Kouvola
Contact: Matti Paloniemi, artistic director
www.rimpparemmi.fi
Finland’s northernmost professional dance theatre offers a unique mix of Finnish folk dance and contemporary dance. They give about 120 performances annually and have toured in more than 20 countries. Also a repertoire of first-class folk dance and music performances.
Genres: Folk dance, folk dance, contemporary dance, performances for young audiences

GLIMS & GLOMS DANCE THEATRE
Espoo
Contact: Riitta Aittokallio, general manager
www.glimsandgloms.com
The Glims & Gloms Dance company was founded in 1999 by Simo Heiskanen and Tuomo Rallo. G&G’s works are characterised by stylistic and inventive visuals and multi-layered themes.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performances for young audiences

TERO SAARNEN COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Jiri Auto, managing director
www.terosaarinen.com
Tero Saarinen’s works have captivated audiences and critics in nearly 40 countries, including at BAM and The Joyce (New York), Chailot & Chatelet (Paris), the South Bank Centre (London), Movimentos Festival (Germany), New Zealand International Arts Festival, and Saitama Arts Theater (Japan), and in commissions for companies such as NDT1, Batkheva, Lyon Opera Ballet and The National Dance Company of Korea. New additions to our repertoire in 2017-2018! Several works available for touring, and with and without live music.
Genres: Contemporary dance, contemporary ballet, community dance, live music performance, dance films

INDEPENDENT DANCE COMPANIES

ARJA RAATIKAINEN & CO.
Helsinki
Contact: Arja Raatikainen, choreographer, artistic director
www.arjaraatikainen-co.fi
Arja Raatikainen (b. 1958) has produced an impressive and varied body of highly praised choreographies since 1973. This uncompromising artist’s path has embraced nuclear issues and movement in time and space, as well as treatment of completely new elements and the search for a balance between disparate elements.
Genre: Contemporary dance

ARJA TILI DANCE COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Arja Tili, choreographer, artistic director
www.arjatili.fi
and www.breakthefight.com
Choreographer Arja Tili is known for breaking genre boundaries and has a knack for revealing the most intimate, secret traits of the human spirit. Her works often depict our dark side: madness, violence, loneliness and greed – but always with a palpable sense of humour, as in her latest work Break the Fight – I was here! (2015).
Genres: Contemporary dance, breakdance, acrobatic, hip-hop, dance theatre, martial arts, visual arts, young audiences

ASSWRISTS DANCE COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Minna Tuovinen, choreographer
www.as2wrists.fi
This unique style blends Argentinian tango with a contemporary vocabulary. In recent years the company has toured extensively in South America, most notably in Argentina and Brazil. The company is diverse, working in dance film, organising international development projects and teaching workshops in dance and choreography.
Genre: Contemporary dance

BOOMTOWN DANCE
Kotka
Contact: Ulla Wirzenius, producer
www.boomtowndance.fi
Boomtown Dance is a crumble of artists based in South-Eastern Finland who produce pieces on the stage and screen both in front of and behind the camera. They also develop teaching units for use in schools. Boomtown runs an annual residency, which has involved actors in addition to the dancers.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, dance film, applied dance

CARL KNIF COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Carl Knif, artistic director
www.carlknifcompany.fi
Dancer and choreographer Carl Knif is truly a singular artist. His art does not resemble anyone else’s. Through his pieces such as Hologram Walls and Manuscript audiences have encountered the dreamlike, humorous qualities of his works. The very personal Red was a huge success, as was his latest premiere, Friends of Dympha.
Genre: Contemporary dance

THE COMPANIA KAARI & RONI MARTIN
Helsinki
Contact: Kaari Martin, Artistic Director
www.compania.fi
Compania Kaari & Roni Martin’s style is contemporary, rooted in the rhythms and forms of flamenco. The work of this international group of artists is characterised by a tight fusion of dance, music and strong visual elements. In 2012 they won first prize in three categories in the prestigious Certamen de Coreografía de Danza Española y Flamenco competition with their work The Raven, and they have toured in 14 countries.
Genres: Contemporary flamenco, live music performance, dance theatre, dance films, young audiences

DANCEBOX
Lakiala
Contact: Teo Himos-Lennik
www.dancebox.com
Dancebox is an independent contemporary dance group from Tampere, founded in 1998. It performs both in Finland and abroad. Performances for a wide range of audiences, young and old, in theatres, at schools and on the streets.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre

DANCE COMPANY GRUPPEN FYRA (G4)
Helsinki
Contact: Pia Liski
www.dancecompany.com
Contemporary dance combined with intelligent humour. Dance theatre and improvisation-based pieces performed in places like parks, streets and trains. Touring 2016/17 with the pieces Reino and Aino, Shirinai-Hito, Great Expectations by Sony Lindfors and Drink the new wine by Virpi Juntti.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre
DANCE COMPANY OFF/BALANCE
Jyväskylä
Contact: Elina Hayrinen and Terhi Kuokkanen, artistic directors
www.offbalance.fi
Central Finland-based company with a versatile repertoire and international recognition. The company produces 1–3 premieres/od-productions per year with top choreographers and artists.
Genres: Contemporary dance, new dance

DANCE THEATRE AURACO
Helsinki
Contact: Paivi Aura, artistic director
www.auuraco.fi
Touring dance company producing 1–3 premieres per year. Auraco produces performances for all ages and has many years’ experience working with and for babies and toddlers under age 3. Audience development and community dance projects are an essential part of Auraco’s work.
Genres: Dance theatre, young audiences

DANCE THEATRE KIAE
Kerava
Contact: Anne Jouhtinen
www.cra-company.com
Multi-artistic productions for adult and young audiences. Traditional stages as well as streets, market squares, parks, shop windows and kindergartens function as performance spaces. The Finno-Ugrian roots inspire with their mysticism.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, multi-artistic performances

DANCETHEATRE LIKERI
Tampere
Contact: Linda Kuhu, choreographer
www.tanssitteatterilikeri.com
Likeri is a young contemporary dance collective producing 2–3 new creations per year. They perform both on traditional stages and in public spaces like galleries and parks. Interaction between the dancers and audience is a key concept for this company, sometimes involving spectators in devising pieces or co-operating with unusual partners.
Genres: Contemporary dance, new dance theatre, dance for young audiences

EHHK-PRODUCTION
Turku
Contact: ehitautanto@gmail.com
www.ehhk.net
Dance productions, collaborations, residencies, the annual F5 festival and more. Ehhk hosts the contemporary art space Kiototo, which consists of two beautiful studios. Founded in 2004.
Genres: New dance, contemporary dance, performance/live art, adult and young audiences

ISMO DANCE COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Ismo-Pekka Heinikmo, artistic director
www.ismodance.fi
Choreographer Ismo-Pekka Heinikmo blends art and performance with new concepts and artistic methods. His social agenda touches on body politics and the aesthetics of movement. His work is multidisciplinary, interactive and transformative, exploring the spectrum of visual culture. For him, dance is a way to perceive, to describe and to be within the world.
Genres: Contemporary Dance, Artwork-specific choreography

JENN I KIVELÄ & KIND PEOPLE
Helsinki
Contact: Jenni Kivela, choreographer
www.jennikivela.com
Creating dance performances since 2002 that combine features from dance and theatre and move between the conceptual and the concrete. Jenni Kivela has a strong and recognisable style. Recently she worked with a piece based on the documentary Grey Gardens.
Genre: contemporary dance

K&C KEKALAINEN & GENRE
Helsinki
Contact: Lilja Lehmukkalo, managing director
www.kekalainencompany.net
The mission of K&C is to promote dance as an intellectual art form with strong potential in political and poetic communication of gender. Choreographer-dancer Sanna Kekalainen’s work expands the experience of a dance performance by combining philosophy, feminism, text and conceptual thinking with highly original movement language.
Genre: Contemporary dance

KINEK ORCHESTRA
Helsinki
Contact: Jarkko Mandelin, artistic director
www.kinektorkestra.fi
In just a short time, this group has created a strong and recognisable style to become one of the most interesting Finnish contemporary dance companies. The movement-based content and philosophy of their works bring together dance techniques, street dance attitudes and circus-like agility.
Genre: Contemporary dance

LIISA PENTTI + CO
Helsinki
Contact: Liisa Pentti, choreographer
www.liisapentti.com
Liisa Pentti + Co’s work is based on the continuously evolving process of asking new questions in contemporary society. The company performs and tours in Finland and abroad. It organises training for professionals and non-professionals, and curates and organises events with themes related to the performing arts and their future.
Genre: Contemporay dance

KATVE [BLIND SPOT]
Helsinki
Contact: Heidi Masalin, info.katve@gmail.com
www.katve.info
Katve [blind spot] is a contemporary dance collective producing fresh and versatile danceworks for adults and young audiences. Humanity, imagination and resilience are the core values of Katve [blind spot] led by choreographers Heidi Masalin and Virva Talonen.
Genres: Contemporary dance, site-specific work, young audiences

KULTAKUVA
Helsinki
Contact: Matti Leppänen
www.kultakuva.fi
Kultakuva is a contemporary dance theatre. The company’s performances deal with contemporary topics, the human condition and society. They work with a wide array of genres from contemporary dance to classical theatre.

MISH KALLINEN & THE COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Mikkio Kallinen, AD/choreographer
www.av-arkki.fi
The Company is a production company of artists from various disciplines. New creations are mainly video dance/animation and interactive choreographic works.
Genres: Contemporary dance, audiovisal

NIINA AIRAKISNEN DANCE PRODUCTIONS (NADP)
Turku
Contact: Niina Airakisen, choreographer|photographer|filmmaker
nadi.p
Niina Airakisen Dance Productions (NADP) combines art and science in international east-coast. NADP focuses on historical and cultural themes through contemporary art, lecture series and dining. At the core of its stage works are a wide dynamic movement range, a close synthesis of movement and light, and a holistic aesthetic visuality.
Genre: Contemporary dance

NOM KOLLEKTIV
Helsinki
Contact: Jukka Nieminen, artistic director
www.nomkollektiv.fi
The company collaborates on diverse projects such as group pieces and solos, installations and films. The company’s creations are described as fresh, new and personal. The relationship with ourselves, our bodies, the other and our time are elements that run through the works. The press reviews of their works have been positive.
Genres: Contemporary dance, new dance
Genres: Franc, Kor, str
Genre: Contemporary dance

PORI DANCE COMPANY
Pori
Contact: Mikko Lampinen or Riikka Lehtopolku
www.poridancecompany.com
Pori Dance Company aims to promote humane values and increase tolerance through dance. It emphasises a message of physicality and a means of exploring the imagination. Most of the company’s repertoire is contemporary, and the company also has a strong history in jazz dance. They have toured in Africa, South Korea, Germany, Russia, North America, France, and many more countries.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performance/live art

PIKESIITEYKSET
An independent dance collective run by dance artists Tiitta Turtta and Marjo Selin inside the cross-art collective PIKET, focusing in making art in relation to their community. Rasa produces ambitious and original dance works especially in Northern Finland and the whole Barents Region. The aim of Rasa is to take dance outside traditional dance venues.

THE TEMPEST GROUP MYRSKYYHYMN
Helsinki
Contact: Mervi Leivo, producer
www.myrskyyhyhma.fi
Founded in 2002. Their work is based on the urge to take dance to people in the midst of their natural environment – in places where dance performances are not a familiar sight.
Genres: Performances and workshops for senior citizens, contemporary dance, dance theatre, dance film

PAE ILMAISEN TEKIJÄN KWENDEL
Helsinki
Contact: Kati Kekäläinen, managing director
www.susanaoleinonen.com
Susanna Leinonen is one of the most internationally acclaimed Finnish choreographers. Her works comprise a series of intriguing and fascinating choreographies at the forefront of Finnish contemporary dance. The company has toured in over 20 countries in several major festivals and venues such as Juditán, The Place and Dance Biennale Tokyo. Available for touring with several works for 1-7 dancers.
Genre: Contemporary dance

RUSA COLLECTIVE
Northern Finland [Tomio/Rovaniemi]
Contact: Tiitta Turtta or Marjo Selin
www.pistyke.org/tanssiliitosiset
An independent dance collective run by dance artists Tiitta Turtta and Marjo Selin inside the cross-art collective PIKET, focusing in making art in relation to their community. Rasa produces ambitious and original dance works especially in Northern Finland and the whole Barents Region. The aim of Rasa is to take dance outside traditional dance venues.

Pursuing the beauty of movement through dance, Tanka Raman is an artist and director whose work incorporates a wide range of disciplines, from music to visual arts, to create a unique and immersive experience for the audience. His performances are characterised by a strong sense of rhythm and a fluidity of movement that captivates the audience.

TANKA BOX
Oulu
Contact: Tanka Raman, artistic director
www.tanka.com
TankaBox creates new works to experience dance using innovative digital techniques to enhance our perception of the moving body. TankaBox is based in Northern Finland and combines dance and visual arts to create a unique and immersive experience for the audience. His performances are characterised by a strong sense of rhythm and a fluidity of movement that captivates the audience.

PIKANMAA REGIONAL DANCE CENTRE
Tampere
Contact: Pia Kulin, managing director
www.sisasuomentanssi.fi/english/
An association for dance professionals. Encourages co-operation, organises various events, training courses, workshops, meetings for professionals, seminars. The centre also runs the Liikuelaiturin venue in Tampere.

CENTRAL FINLAND REGIONAL DANCE CENTRE
Jyväskylä
Contact: Mari Hautala, managing director
www.tanssinkeskus.fi
Regional centre for dance in Central Finland. Supports dance and creates work opportunities for professionals. Organises the Tanssirukkia festival in August.

REGIONAL CENTRE FOR DANCE IN EASTERN FINLAND / ITAK
Kuopio
Contact: Eva Eransio, executive producer
www.itak.fi
Promotes dance, creates work opportunities for professionals, offers training, and supports dance production in Eastern Finland. Organises the Paikalliskiitokki festival in June and the Lonely in the Rain festival in November. ITAK also manages the Sirkku venue in Kuopio.
DIRECTORY OF FINNISH DANCE

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

ANTI - CONTEMPORARY ART FESTIVAL

Kuopio
Contact:
Jarkko Mandelin
www.antifestival.com

International contemporary art festival presenting site-specific works made for public spaces. In autumn and various other dates.

APINAFEST!
‘the second cousin of all festivals’
Helsinki
Contact: Jarkko Mandelin
www.apinafest.com

International contemporary dance festival: performances, clubs and panels. In April.

BALTIC CIRCLE FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Hanna Nyman, managing director
www.balticcircle.fi

International contemporary theatre festival & platform for developing new trends and ideas. In November.

BRAVO!
Helsinki
Contact: info@passitejy.org
www.lastentaidet.fi

International theatre festival for children and young audiences held every second year in the Helsinki metropolis area. In March.

DANCE MONTH FESTIVAL
Pori
Contact: Mikko Lampinen, artistic director
www.poridancecompany.com

International dance festival held every spring between March and April by Pori Dance Company at Pori Theatre along with other venues.

FACTORY FESTIVAL MANIFEST
Turku
Contact: Katja Lehmannsari, producer & programme director
www.manifestehtas.fi

Annual festival with wide-ranging programmes from contemporary dance and new circus to exhibitions. In September.

FULL MOON DANCE FESTIVAL
Pohjanmaa
Contact: tuotanto@fullmoondance.fi
www.fullmoondance.fi

Contemporary dance from Finland and abroad: courses and discussions. In July.

HELSINKI FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Laura Gottlieben, press officer
www.helsinkifestivali.fi

The largest arts festival in Finland, featuring classical and world music, dance, theatre and urban events. In August.

HELSINKI FLAMENCO FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Helsinki Flamenco Association flamenco@flamenco.fi

The festival brings outstanding flamenco artists from Spain to Helsinki every year. A week full of courses, performances and festivities. In February.

HURRA!
Helsinki
Contact: katarina.metsalampiphel.fi
www.burra.org

A national festival of performing arts for children and young people. In March.

JYVÄSKYLÄ FESTIVAL
Jyväskylä
Contact: Mari Lankinen, production manager
www.jyvaskylanytja.fi

City festival for different art forms: concerts, non-verbal theatre, dance, a children’s programme. In July.

KAKTUS DANCE FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Pia Liski, managing director
www.kaktusdansesfestiivali.fi

Kaktus dance festival is held every second year by Dance Company Gruppen. In June.

KAUSTINEN FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL
Kaustinen
Contact: kansantanssi@kaustinen.net
www.kaustinen.net

The largest folk music event in the Nordic countries – all the folk music and dance you can handle in a week! In July.

KOKKOLAN TALVITANSIT / WINTER DANCE IN KOKKOLA
Kokkola
Contact: Anne Peippo, producer
www.kokkolantanssit.fi

A four-day event, full of contemporary dance and dance theatre. In February.

KUOPIO DANCE FESTIVAL
Kuopio
Contact: Anna Pitkänen, Festival Director
www.pkuopiadancefestival.fi

The largest dance festival in the Nordic countries. The programme ranges from contemporary dance to classical ballet, workshops and a varied fringe programme during June.

LAPPEENRANTA INTERNATIONAL BALLET GALA
Lappeenranta
Contact: Irma Salomaa@ordcandance.com or Juhani Tarasuo, artistic director
www.ordcandance.com

International ballet gala featuring performances by local and international artists. In June.

LOIKA DANCE FILM FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Kati Kallio, artistic director
www.loikka.fi

International dance performances for children and young audiences. In April.

LONELY IN THE RAIN?
Helsinki
Contact: Eeva Eloranta, executive producer
www.itak.fi

Festival for contemporary dance, performance and improvisation in November.

MOVING IN NOVEMBER
Helsinki
Contact: Ari Tenhula & Mikael Aaltoinen, artistic directors
www.movinginnovember.fi

International contemporary dance festival in the Helsinki capital region. In November.

oudance FESTIVAL
Oulu
Contact: Jarkko Lehmannsari, artistic director
www.jojo.fi/festival/oudance

International and local performances in Northern Finland from all genres of dance with a contemporary twist. In September.

PAIKALLISLIKE
Kuopio
Contact: Asta Elijo, producer
www.kokkolantanssit.fi

Platform presenting new productions by local dance artists. In June.

PISPALA SCHOTTISCHE DANCE MANIA
Tampere
Contact: info@pootiisi.net
www.pootiisi.net

New folk music and dance, concerts, performances, training. Every two years, next in October 2017.

RUUTIA INTERNATIONAL DANCE FESTIVAL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG AUDIENCES
Helsinki
Contact: Kaisa Karikonen, producer
www.ruutia.fi

International dance performances for children and young audiences. In April.

SIDE STEP FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Harri Kurelahi, artistic director
www.zodiak.fi

Contemporary dance, cutting-edge international performances, lectures, artist dialogues and workshops. Organized by Zodiak – Center for New Dance. In February.

TAMPere THEATRE FESTIVAL Tampere
Contact: Eevamaja Miettinen-Kopas, PR manager
www.teatterikesa.fi

The programme of Finland’s main international theatre festival includes new drama, modernised classics, dance theatre, contemporary circus and street theatre. In August.

TIME OF DANCE
Jyväskylä
Contact: Anni Lahti
www.tanssinaika.fi

Finnish contemporary dance. In September: Central Finland.

URB – URBAN ART FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Mikael Aaltoinen, Kiasma Theatre
www.urb.fi

Urban dance and theatre, site-specific performances, visual arts. In August.

WESTERN FINLAND REGIONAL DANCE CENTRE
Turku
Contact:
Rikka Campomane, producer
www.mikronlampa.fi

The Western Finland Regional Dance Centre covers Southwestern Finland and the province of Satakunta. The centre aims to develop and promote dance in the region, creating more opportunities for professionals, creating a greater awareness and understanding of the art form, supporting artists and maintaining and building networks between artists, arts policies, cultural institutions and local councils on both a regional and a Nordic level.

ZODIAK – CENTER FOR NEW DANCE / REGIONAL DANCE CENTRE IN HELSINKI
Helsinki
Contact: Harri Kurelahi, artistic director
www.zodiak.fi

Zodiak – Center for New Dance functions as a regional centre for dance in Helsinki.

REGIONAL CENTRE OF DANCE IN NORTHERN FINLAND

REGIONAL CENTRE OF DANCE IN OSTROBOTTIN Vaasa
Contact: Annika Sillander, manager www.pohjoismetsarttasi.net

The aim of the centre is to develop the dance sector in the region by creating job opportunities for professional artists; making dance accessible; developing a greater awareness and understanding of the art form, supporting artists and maintaining and building networks between artists, art forms, cultural institutions and local councils on both a regional and a Nordic level.
FINNISH DANCE IN FOCUS 2016–2017
www.fullmoondance.fi
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Tero Saarinen company

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21.–26.7.2017
in Pori / Arola

ZODIAK
CENTER FOR NEW DANCE
HELLESTI, FINLAND
ARE YOU CONTEMPORARY ENOUGH?
www.zodiak.fi
The Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki biennially offers two MA degrees with an orientation towards either dance or choreography. These residential programmes are open to international applicants with sufficient skills in the English language and a previous BA degree. The deadline for applications will be in the beginning of 2017, and entrance examinations will take place in May that year.

Orientation towards artistic research, integration of practice and theory, networking and collaboration on multiple levels as well as an open approach to both choreography and performance enable students to orientate themselves toward the field of contemporary arts. Resident staff and national as well as international guest teachers jointly provide the teaching. Mobility between the university’s different academies opens up new possibilities for the students, who also benefit from the collaboration between these two programmes.

The MA programmes provide possibilities for doctoral studies, e.g. at the Performing Arts Research Centre, TUTKE, which is responsible for all research and post-graduate studies at the Theatre Academy.

This pioneering education dating back to 1983 has had a crucial impact on the Finnish dance scene over the last three decades. New MA students are admitted every second year. The BA programme, however, is so far open only to students who are fluent in Finnish.

More information on student selections will be available at www.uniarts.fi/en/studies/.

More details on the programmes and faculties at www.uniarts.fi

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