

## Three powerhouses bring their can't-miss dance shows to the stage in Vancouver

[MARSHA LEDERMAN](#)

Vancouver — The Globe and Mail

Published Wednesday, Mar. 05 2014, 1:06 PM EST



It's a head-spinning week for dance in Vancouver, with three local powerhouses bringing can't-miss shows to the stage. International dance darling Crystal Pite returns from a sabbatical with a reworked remount of her company Kidd Pivot's Shakespeare-inspired *The Tempest Replica*. The exciting Tara Cheyenne Friedenberg will dance at the altar of faith and aging in the world premiere of her *Porno Death Cult*, where Christ meets mid-life crisis. And the Vancouver International Dance Festival kicks off with the world premiere of *Mustard Seed*, a

collaboration between Chan Hon Goh's Goh Ballet in Vancouver and mainland China's Guangdong Modern Dance Company.

### **Porno Death Cult**

A self-described spiritual atheist following the route of an ancient Catholic pilgrimage, Tara Cheyenne Friedenberg walked the El Camino de Santiago in southern France and Spain in 2010 with her husband Marc Stewart (who composed the music for this piece). As they made the 34-day, body-battering trip from cathedral to cathedral, she had a revelation.

"The big statues of Jesus got bigger, they got better-looking, and more scantily clad," Friedenberg explains. "I know it's super sacrilegious but I was thinking this is pretty hot Jesus here. And I'm looking around and most of the people in here are women. Fair enough; I guess this is an acceptable place to come and get a little eye candy. And also as we walked the statues got kind of bloodier too, so they got kind of more gruesome and more sexy. So this flippant thing popped into my mind: bit of a porno death cult going on here. And it stuck in my head – what does that really mean? I wasn't meaning to dismiss the religion or the faith of people. It just struck me as it's tactile, it's visceral, it's a real energy."

The work which resulted is a rumination on faith and suffering in this journey through life, featuring a self-inspired central character Maureen, a lonely woman who, at 41 (same age as Friedenberg) is looking to be filled up with the light of the spirit; as well as a preacher, a yoga instructor, and Jesus – all danced by Friedenberg (who has been practising yoga, as well as dancing, since she was very young).

Friedenberg has teamed up with big deal local theatre director Marcus Youssef, and in a departure from past work, will dance not on a bare stage but against an elaborate set which will transform the Firehall Arts Centre into a sort of church.

Friedenberg, whose upbringing was religion-free, seems well aware that the subject matter may not sit well with everyone.

"Knowing that, my feeling is that if I stay really super-honest, it won't be offensive. If somebody's really devout and thinks you should never try and pretend to be Jesus, that person might find it a little offensive, but I'm fairly confident that that kind of person isn't going to a show called *Porno Death Cult*."

*Porno Death Cult* is at the Firehall Arts Centre March 5-8

### **The Tempest Replica**

The demands of being an in-demand choreographer were getting to Crystal Pite, who took the ending of her company's residency with Frankfurt's Kunsterhaus Mousonturm (a relationship that granted Kidd Pivot \$500,000 in annual funding) as a cue to take a sabbatical. Anticipating a year of professional development where she would fill up with other art, Pite instead recharged her lithe batteries mostly by spending time with her son Niko, now 3, with whom she'd been touring since he was 7 weeks old.

"I wanted to go home. I wanted to cook in my own kitchen and take him to art class and the playground and just really experience that with him," she says from the rehearsal hall.

She returned to the studio a month ago, where she has been making changes to her 2011 work *The Tempest Replica* – which Pite describes as a "very fussy, delicate show." The work, which premiered in Frankfurt in 2011, was a departure for Pite, who has a contemporary dancer's aversion to narrative, and who sees dance as an inefficient way to tell a story. But she gave herself the challenge of working with an existing script and developed a performance that tells Shakespeare's stormy tale in two different ways, using projected text to aid the exposition.

The Vancouver dates launch a tour that will include Canadian Stage in Toronto, and the prestigious Sadler's Wells in London – which named Pite associate artist last fall.

After the tour, Pite will begin work on a new Kidd Pivot production, as well as a new work for Nederlands Dans Theater (where she has been associate choreographer since 2008), and a new work for 60 dancers for Sadler's Wells. She's also in discussions about commissions with London's Royal Ballet and the Paris Opera Ballet.

"I feel hungry again to make something, and I haven't felt like that in a long time – the impulse to create ... the feeling of a good pressure from within," she says. "I have been making things for many years, lots and lots of things, and most of those things I've really enjoyed making but they were all in response to an opportunity or a deadline or an expectation, so this is a great feeling to walk back into artistic life and feel hunger again."

*The Tempest Replica is at The Goldcorp Centre for the Arts at SFU Woodward's Mar 6-8 with a preview Mar 5, and tours to various cities through May.*

### **Mustard Seed**

The seeds of this work go way back – Chan Hon Goh's parents, principal dancers who moved to Vancouver from China, have known Guangdong Modern Dance Company's pioneering artistic director Willy Tsao for many years. Tsao has served as an artistic adviser to the Goh Ballet, the Vancouver dance academy started by the Gohs and which Chan Hon Goh (former principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada) now runs.

But this collaboration is a big step forward in the relationship between the classical ballet academy and mainland China's first professional modern dance company. For the first time, the two companies – based in sister cities Vancouver and Guangzhou – are creating a new work together.

*Mustard Seed* takes its name and inspiration from a Buddhist parable in which the tiny mustard grain is responsible for revealing a universal truth.

GMDC resident choreographer Liu Qi created the work in China for dancers in both companies.

"The logistics were at times challenging," says Goh, who e-mailed Liu videos of dancers doing specific movements in their contemporary classes to help her select the Canadian dancers for the piece. The two women met face to face for the first time late last year, when Goh participated in a trade mission to China led by Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson.

The group – 10 dancers from Goh and 12 from GMDC – will have had less than two weeks together in the studio before *Mustard Seed* has its world premiere on Friday.

“The challenge here is having two groups of dancers who have never worked together before who come from such culturally differently backgrounds and who are at different stages of maturity,” says Goh. “But I think that’s what [Liu’s] enjoying as well, and that’s what the audience will see is that new connection and also the difference of genres of dance. You have a very specific contemporary group of dancers who don’t do any classical training and then you have my group who are more focused on classical training and do a little bit of contemporary work.”

*Mustard Seed* will be presented with *Ballanchine’s Walspurgisnacht Ballet (Goh Ballet)* and *Liu’s Voice After (GMDC)*. The plan is to present *Mustard Seed* in China next year. *Select Works/Mustard Seed* is at the Vancouver Playhouse as part of the Vancouver International Dance Festival March 7 and 8.