

Goh Ballet and Guangdong Modern Dance meet in a cultural meld

by [ALEXANDER VARTY](#) on MAR 5, 2014 at 9:00 AM



YOU DON'T HAVE to dig deep to see where the Vancouver International Dance Festival's focus on hybrid forms comes from: it's an obvious outgrowth of its founders' personal circumstances. Barbara Bourget is a ballet-trained francophone, but she specializes in a Japanese art form, *butoh*, and works in an anglophone environment; Californian-born Jay Hirabayashi is half Japanese and often seems just as passionate about music as he is about movement. How could they not program a festival that goes way beyond its mandate of showcasing the best in modern dance?

That said, one of this year's most anticipated VIDF events will also be one of its most conventional—at first. When Vancouver's Goh Ballet and the Guangdong Modern Dance Company hit the Vancouver Playhouse stage on Friday and Saturday (March 7 and 8), the local troupe will kick things off with *Walpurgisnacht Ballet*, a 1975 work from George Balanchine, set to the music of the 19th-century French composer Charles Gounod. The Guangdong

dancers will counter with resident choreographer Liu Qi's *Voice After*, a more thoroughly modern work set to American composer Paul Dresher's thickly textured score. It's an intriguing pairing, but things will really get interesting when both troupes join forces to premiere Liu Qi's *Mustard Seed*.

For Bourget, the new work offers a rare opportunity to compare, contrast, and combine the sinuous movements of ballet with the startling new developments now emerging from China.

"I think it'll be a very interesting show, very stimulating," she says of the collaboration, which was initiated by former National Ballet of Canada principal dancer Chan Hon Goh. Asked why, Bourget says she's looking forward to seeing how her Chinese counterparts incorporate the "ideas and philosophies of martial arts" into their work, something that she and Hirabayashi have explored in their own choreography for *Kokoro Dance*.

"This is really more about the centre of the body pushing through," she explains. "In Japanese culture they call it *tanden*, but we just call it guts. It would be better if we had a nicer word for it, but we don't. But it's this shared idea that has really come to the fore in dance in the past 30 years, about this central core that really powers the movement. I think you're going to see some powerhouse dance, for sure."