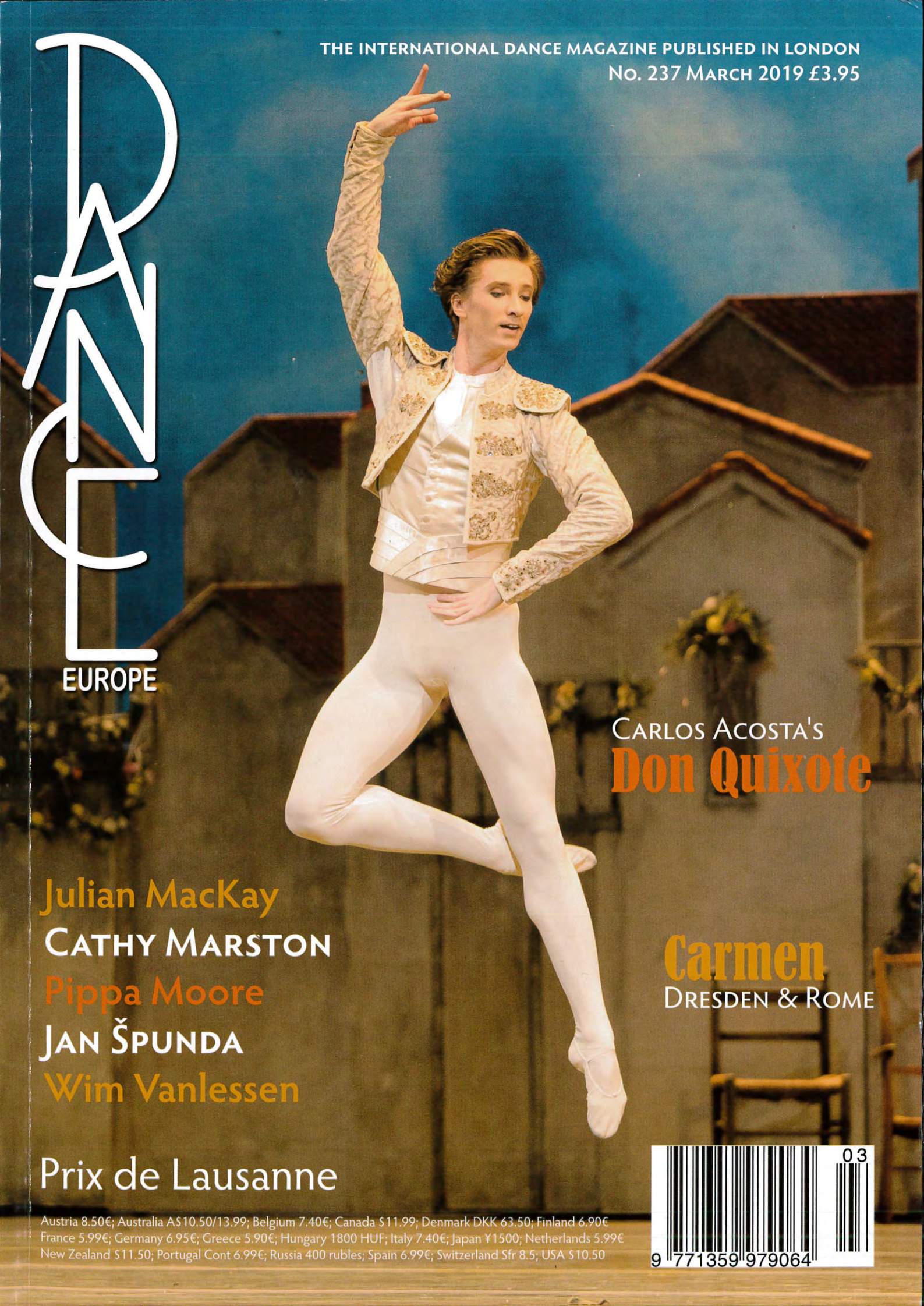
THE INTERNATIONAL DANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHED IN LONDON
No. 237 March 2019 £3.95

DANCE EUROPE



Carlos Acosta's
Don Quixote

Julian MacKay

Cathy Marston

Pippa Moore

Jan Špunda

Wim Vanlessen

Carmen
Dresden & Rome

Prix de Lausanne

Austria 8.50€; Australia A$10.50/13.99; Belgium 7.40€; Canada $11.99; Denmark DKK 63.50; Finland 6.90€
France 5.99€; Germany 6.95€; Greece 5.90€; Hungary 1800 HUF; Italy 7.40€; Japan ¥1500; Netherlands 5.99€
New Zealand $11.50; Portugal Cont 6.99€; Russia 400 rubles; Spain 6.99€; Switzerland Sfr 8.5; USA $10.50

9 771359 979064 03

Cathy Marston on making Victoria

VIKI WESTALL sits in on a rehearsal for Cathy Marston's new Victoria for Northern Ballet and then asks the choreographer about the creation process

The first thing that strikes me about choreographer Cathy Marston is her inherent attention to the music. Every nuance of composer Philip Feeney's new score for her ballet is explored: with each playback a step or gesture is altered to better pick out and reflect the notes until, with constant refinement, dance, shape, story, emotion and musicality all gel. In this scene, a pas de trois between the Young Beatrice (Victoria's youngest daughter, around whose story the ballet is based), Liko (the charming and gallant Prince Henry of Battenburg, whom Victoria eventually allows Beatrice to marry) and the Old Beatrice is being created, the older Beatrice looking back on her brief period of intense happiness on falling in love. The choreographer is constantly fine-tuning. "Miki, put your face in his hand, like a little bird, it reads differently," she explains. "It's your nape of neck that opens you up – the second time you did it was nicer." Visually the trio becomes cleaner and more effective, like an artist building a picture, stroke by stroke. Constant adjustment means that the distance between the three optimises the clarity of the steps and the sculpture of the whole. "You know when you go in a swimming pool, it makes you use your arms differently – I want it like that," she instructs. The dancers repeat the sections over and over, refining spacing, and one is full of admiration for their skill in absorbing the choreography so quickly, for organising limbs bodies and eyes in non-classroom-specific vocabulary and also for their easy understanding with Cathy, and their willingness to try and suggest.

Northern Ballet - Abigail Prudames and Joseph Taylor in rehearsals for Cathy Marston's *Victoria*. © Steffen Aarfing

How does one tout for business as a choreographer? Are you taken out for dinner, do you get an official invitation or is it just mentioned over the phone?
God, no! I got a one-sentence email from David!

Is that how it normally works?
Well – yeah! I got 'Do you want to do a ballet on Victoria?' - I think that was the gist of it! I do know David well, but I didn't answer straight away as I hadn't even watched the TV programme. The email arrived on the Friday night, so I downloaded the series and started watching. I was halfway through episode six on the Sunday and I got a text to say 'And?????'

It is such a massive story!
Yes – almost 100 years of world history.

I didn't realise Victoria's daughter Beatrice had re-written most of her journals. What brought you to centring the ballet around her?
Well, Uzma Hameed (the dramaturge) and I read loads of stuff –

Have you worked with her before?
No, this is a new relationship, which is great. Because I have several projects on the go, I kind of need different teams for each. Uzma was recommended to me by several people who thought we would get on – she had done a lot of work with Wayne McGregor, *Woolf Works* for example. So she and I started reading independently, exchanging bits on the phone for a couple of months, and then in the January she came out to Switzerland for a week and we just thrashed it out. I had come across this little story about Beatrice, her relationship with Victoria and about her re-writing the diaries, and we were looking for a perspective that wasn't us saying "This is who Victoria was" because there are so many points of view on that. She wasn't really just one person, she meant different things to different people, so we wanted a clear perspective that wasn't reliable, so to speak. I thought it was so interesting, this idea of rewriting your mother – I don't know who my mother was before I was born, you get little snippets but you don't really know. And in Beatrice's case, she can't have remembered her father (Prince Albert died when she was three) and so Beatrice would have only known Victoria as this widow in black. She would have discovered another person by reading the diaries. I found that fascinating, and also the emotional journey it must have taken Beatrice on. I thought this was a good frame for us to view Victoria from, and it also allows us to jump in and out of episodes in her life.

Why did you choose Philip Feeney to compose the score? And how do composition and choreography come together – does one follow the other?
I love working with Phil, we have done a lot together – we just did *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in Canada. What happens is that Uzma and I work the scenario together and produce a document with timings, then I meet with Phil and Stefan (Aarfing), the designer. We Skype a lot, and he sends me

WE ARE UNIQUE

ELMHURST BALLET SCHOOL | BIRMINGHAM
A world leader in ballet education and training. Nurturing individuality in the UK's youngest, most progressive, cultural city.
Be UNIQUE – Train at Elmhurst Ballet School.
#YourPlaceForDance

www.elmhurstdance.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)121 472 6655

@Elmhurstballet @Elmhurstballetschool @Elmhurstballetschool

Patron HRH The Duchess of Cornwall Registered Charity 1040286

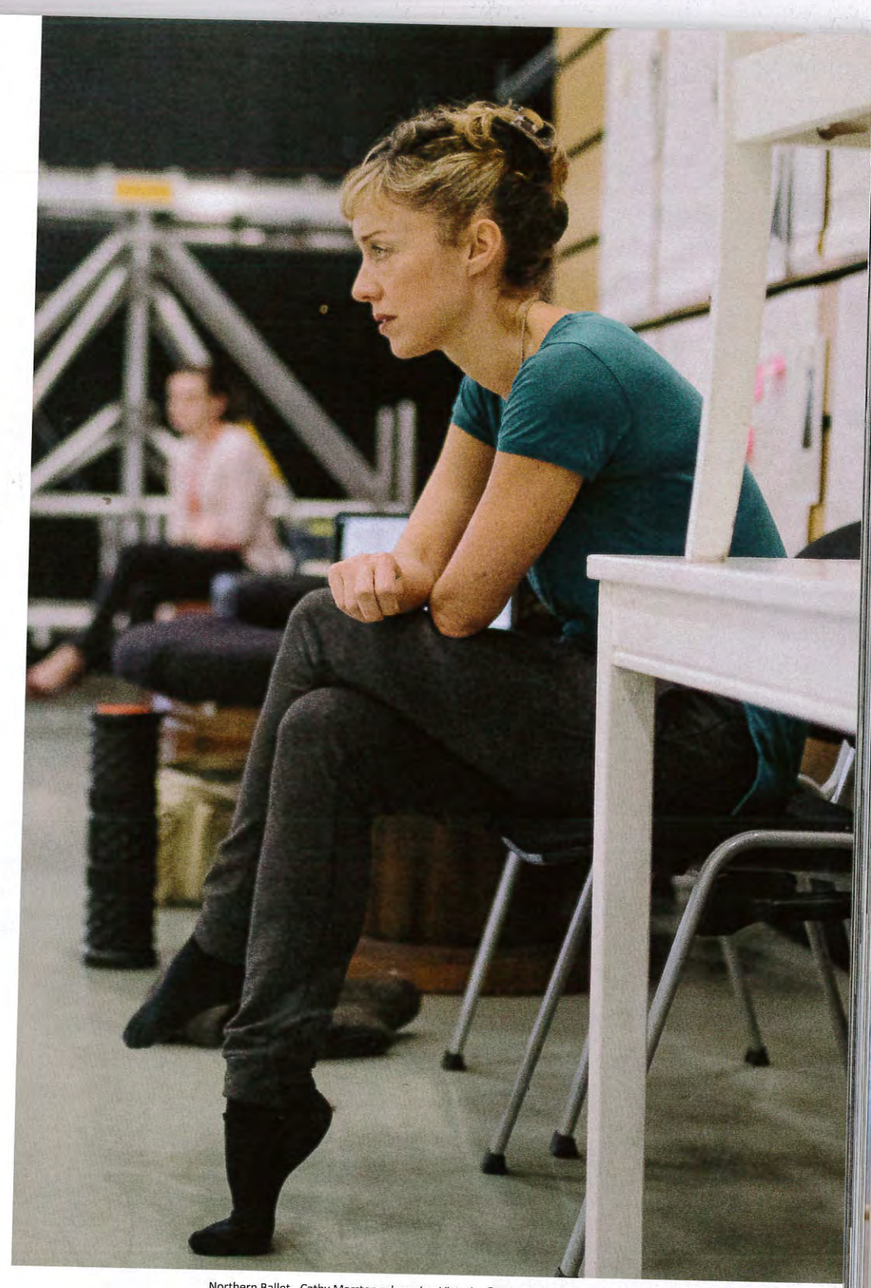
elmhurst ballet school
IN ASSOCIATION WITH BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

little musical drafts – to be honest, the quicker and less developed they are the better, because then I can say yes and give direction, or no, I'm not sure. We've got an easy shorthand now. Once we find the direction for each little bit he goes on and develops it. He just gets the narrative dancing thing. It's very collaborative and I think we are both really clear that the story is the leader.

How much do you create outside the studio?
I don't do any movement before – unless it's for a big group scene and I'm under time pressure. I produce a document on my PC called The Master Plan – some people love it; some people hate it! It's a huge spreadsheet and I write the scenario for each scene, timings, quotes and references I need to remember, costumes and lights get put in eventually too, then all of the dancers have lots of lists of words and background information about their characters. So then, when I'm setting up, I know what the Beatrice things and her motifs are going to be, so I have a whole load of material to inspire me.

How much does working with particular dancers influence you?
Oh, hugely! I just said to the dancers last night how nice it is coming back here again as they are so responsive. Because, you know, it's not the biggest company, but they are great dancers and we have built a relationship, so they know how I work and they are very creative. There is trust there as well, and that takes time to build. Take Pippa Moore, for example, who is Old Beatrice: this is the fourth piece we have created together, so now even if she's not sure about where I am going there is this trust there, which really helps.

Do you have a constant stream of ideas about ballets you would like to create?
I keep a list on my phone as things come to mind, but it takes a while to get the right opportunity, it's not just doing the top of the list for the next person that asks. Now people are asking, which is amazing and wonderful! But you have to be careful with your ideas – there is one particular full-length I really want to make, but obviously I don't want anyone else to know and then do it! It looks like it might happen now, so we will see. But often there are specific parameters. However, like with San Francisco Ballet, I could have made what I wanted there but I felt it was an opportunity to explore American literature, which I maybe I couldn't do everywhere, so by doing Ethan Frome it was a story that a lot of the audience recognised. If I'd created that here it wouldn't have worked so well, although now it's a piece that stands on its own, it's coming to London. *Victoria* could be hard to do in certain places as politically there's a whole lot of stuff in there. Luckily Karen Kain thinks it will go down very well in her country, so it is a co-production with The National Ballet of Canada.



Northern Ballet - Cathy Marston rehearsing *Victoria*. © Drew Forsyth

***Victoria* will be premiered this March in Leeds. What is next for you on the horizon?**
Birmingham Royal Ballet have asked Ballet Black to perform my piece *The Suit* for them in the autumn as the central piece in their triple bill – I don't know how that came about, but the idea of a mixed company programme is great. Then *Jane Eyre* is going to The Met with ABT, which is super exciting, and afterwards it goes to Joffrey Ballet and to Chicago in the autumn. Oh, yes, and *Snowblind* – the Ethan Frome piece with San Francisco - will be at the Wells in May/June. I'm not sure there is anything else I am allowed to announce just yet...