

ASZURE BARTON & ARTISTS

Canada / USA

"Barton is clearly brilliant."

- San Francisco Chronicle



Photo by Donald Lee, courtesy of the Banff Centre

www.aszurebarton.com

ASZURE BARTON & ARTISTS

Aszure Barton: Director / Choreographer



Canadian choreographer ASZURE BARTON started tap dancing at the age of three and received her formal dance training at the National Ballet School in Toronto, where she was one of the founders of the Stephen Godfrey Choreographic Showcase. She also received training at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School and John Cranko-Schule in Stuttgart, Germany. She has been commissioned to create for **Mikhail Baryshnikov, Fang-Yi Sheu, Ekaterina Shipulina (Bolshoi Ballet), Nederlands Dans Theater, The National Ballet of Canada, American Ballet Theatre, Houston Ballet, Ballet British Columbia, Sydney Dance Company, Hubbard Street**

Dance Chicago, The Martha Graham Dance Company, The National Ballet School of Canada, The Juilliard School, New York University (Tisch School of the Arts), Steps Ensemble (NY), The Laban Institute (UK), Arts Umbrella Dance Company (Vancouver, BC), and Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal (Resident Choreographer 2005-08). Other work includes choreography for the 2006 Broadway revival production of **The Threepenny Opera** directed by Scott Elliott (translation by **Wallace Shawn** and starring **Alan Cumming, Jim Dale, Nellie Mackay, Ana Gasteyer, and Cyndi Lauper**), numerous film and installation projects, and international outreach activities such as Kenya's Earth Project: Healing the Rift, at the Laikipia Nature Conservancy. She was also commissioned to choreograph an excerpt for the production of *Salome* starring **Al Pacino, Kevin Anderson, and Jessica Chastain**, directed by **Estelle Parsons**. Ms. Barton has performed with many celebrated artists and companies including Mikhail Baryshnikov, Hell's Kitchen Dance, The National Ballet of Canada, Wendy Osserman Dance Company, and Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal. She has been artist in residence at The Banff Centre in Canada and the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York City. She has received numerous awards and grants internationally including Canada Council for the Arts, Council des Arts de Québec, Alberta Culture and Trust for Mutual Understanding. Ms. Barton was featured at IdeaCity, "The Meeting of Great Minds," (Toronto, ON) in 2010 and was proclaimed the official **Ambassador of Contemporary Choreography in Alberta, Canada**.

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The Company

Aszure Barton & Artists is a collective of visual, sound, and performing artists, cohering in creative residencies in Canada and the United States to evoke the movement-based vision and free spirit of its founder. Aszure Barton has earned the distinguished reputation of producing striking choreography for stage and film, and together with her intimate ensemble, she continues to develop critically acclaimed productions around the globe. Her works have toured to Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa and Australia.

Aszure Barton & Artists offers residencies, lecture demonstrations, masterclasses and workshops. One of our goals is to ignite interest and enthusiasm for dance by sharing the creative process with people, young and old, around the world.

Aszure & Artists Foundation is a 501(c)3, non-profit, organization that relies on gifts from many generous individuals and organizations. On behalf of Aszure Barton and the artists associated with the company, thank you for your interest. For more information please log on to www.aszurebarton.com/support.html



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JONATHAN EMANUELL ALSBERRY (rehearsal director/performer) joined Aszure Barton & Artists in 2005, just prior to graduation from The Juilliard School in 2006. He has assisted Ms. Barton at The Juilliard School and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, performed for Prince Edward III in Banff, Canada, and shared two tours with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Hell's Kitchen Dance. Other credits include Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, Luna Negra Dance Theater, Nilas Martins Dance Company, and Daniel Gwartzman Dance Company.

CHARISSA BARTON (performer) began dancing at the age of three in Edmonton, AB, Canada. After 12 years of training in Classical Ballet, Jazz, Tap, Modern, Drama, and Musical Theater she joined the Alberta Ballet Company. She then moved to NYC to pursue her BFA at the Juilliard School under the direction of Benjamin Harkarvy where she performed the works of Jiri Kylian, Pearl Lang, Colin Connor, Lila York, Robert Battle, and others. She was invited to join the renowned Parsons Dance Company in 1994 and toured internationally with the company for 4 years. She has since been a member of Aszure Barton & Artists and is honored to be involved in the development of this inspiring project. Charissa is a practitioner and teacher of the Rising Star Healing Modality.

Born and raised in Canada, CHERICE BARTON (rehearsal director/performer) has been closely involved with her sister's company since 2002, and is thrilled to have developed a unique artistic collaboration with Aszure over the years, one of which continues to evolve and inspire. This distinctive professional relationship has been commended by such organizations as Jacobs Pillow Dance festival, Summerdance Santa Barbara, Baryshnikov Arts Center, the Banff Center, Arts Umbrella Dance Company and most recently, American Ballet Theater. Currently based in New York City, Cherice is also working as a consultant and artistic associate to numerous companies such as the ABRI Agency, and has most recently been contracted to join Danny Ezralow as the assistant & resident choreographer for Julie Taymor's "Spider-Man", scheduled to open on Broadway in 2010. Cherice returned to NYC in 2007 from Las Vegas where she was the resident choreographer of Franco Dragone's Cirque spectacle, Le Reve, at the Wynn Resort Hotel and Casino and later continued to freelance as a dance evaluator for the casting department of Dragone. Along with setting works on students from the Juilliard School, Cherice is also invited on a regular basis to teach master classes and adjudicate at Dance Conventions in Mexico, Canada and the United States. Ms. Barton's performance career spans over 15 years in over 30 countries worldwide. I love you, Aszure, with all my heart.

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ERIC BEAUCHESNE (performer) was born in Québec, graduated from l'Ecole Supérieure de Danse du Québec, and has danced with the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe, the Stadttheater Moenchengladbach, and Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal. He has performed with Canadian dance icons such as Paul-André Fortier, Crystal Pite, Louise Lecavalier, and Aszure Barton. Eric has collaborated as repetiteur and teacher for Kidd Pivot, Cullberg Ballet, and Ballet BC. He is a founding member of Aszure Barton & Artists.

WILLIAM BRISCOE (performer) began his dance training at the Repertory Dance Company of East Harlem, at age 10. He went on to train at LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts, while also performing in Aida at the Metropolitan Opera House, Merce Cunningham Dance Center and later received his BFA from The Juilliard School in 2003. Upon graduation William became a leading member of Aszure Barton & Artists and performed two seasons with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Hell's Kitchen Dance. Briscoe also toured with Robert Battle's Battleworks, abcdancecompany, in St. Polten, Austria and Geneva, Switzerland, working with choreographers, Karole Armitage, Georg Reischl, Wayne McGregor, Salome Bitton, and Director and choreographer Nicolas Musin. In 2010, William created The Eden Dress, a draft of choreography and songs performed and collaborated with his friend. Currently, William freelances between New York and Europe as a dancer and teacher.

Born and raised in Norway, Maine, TOBIN DEL CUORE (performer) started dancing at the age of twelve. At sixteen he began his ballet training at the Walnut Hill School, moving on later to the Juilliard School, where graduated in 2001 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Upon graduating Del Cuore joined the artists of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago where he danced until 2007. Del Cuore has most recently worked with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Philadelphia's BalletX, Mark Morris Dance Group (supplemental) and Norwegian Cruise Lines.

JENNA FAKHOURY (performer) is a native of Asheville, NC, and received a BFA from the North Carolina School of the Arts in 2007. Upon moving to New York City, she has worked and danced for the José Limon Dance Company, Steeledance, Shen Wei Dance Arts, and Lar Lubovitch, among others. Jenna joined the ranks of Aszure Barton & Artists in 2010.

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Since graduating from The Juilliard School, STEPHAN LAKS (performer) has worked with a variety of companies and dance projects across North America and Europe. He is currently a Rehearsal Director with the Göteborg Ballet in Sweden and has collaborated with Aszure since January 2009.

ANDREW MURDOCK (performer) began dancing in his hometown of St. Albert, AB, Canada. He continued his training at The Juilliard School and received a BFA in 2007, under the direction of Lawrence Rhodes. Andrew has collaborated with Aszure on many platforms including Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, and American Ballet Theatre (Rehearsal Assistant). He has been a proud family member of Aszure Barton & Artists since 2009 and is constantly inspired by this incredible circle of creators. Andrew dances in dedication to his mother, who taught him to follow his heart.

EMILY OLDAK (performer) was born in Rochester, NY, and raised in Queens. She attended La Guardia High School for Music and the Performing Arts, graduated from The Juilliard School in 2005, and immediately after joined Cirque du Soleil for their creation Love. She was also the body double for Shakira in her music video “Did It Again.” Working with Aszure Barton & Artists, since early 2009, has been a dream come true for her.

LEV “LJOVA” ZHURBIN (collaborator) – hailed by Billboard as “one of New York’s fastest- rising composers and instrumentalists” and by The New York Times as “an eclectic with an ear for texture...strikingly original and soulful” – was born in Moscow and moved to New York in 1990. He performs as a violist with Ljova and the Kontraband, string quartets, jazz combos, and Gypsy bands; arranges music for Yo-Yo Ma, Kronos Quartet, Jay-Z, and others; and composes for film, TV, dance, and the concert stage.

MICHELLE JANK (collaborator) is a stylist and lover of dressing up and has just completed her fourth season selling in Paris under her own label. This is her third collaboration with Aszure Barton, after meeting through Sydney Dance Company and designing costumes for the acclaimed Sid’s Waltzing Masquerade. Michelle is based in New York City and works frequently in Sydney, London and Paris.

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NJO KONG KIE (collaborator) is a Toronto-based pianist and composer. He collaborated with Ms. Barton on creations for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and Nederlands Dance Theater. He has been, since 1996, the pianist/musical director of Montreal-based modern dance company, La La La Human Steps. He has given close to 500 performances with the company in major cities in Canada and abroad, including Paris, London, Edinburgh, Berlin, Cologne, Weimar, Dresden, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Vilnius, Moscow, Rome, Vienna, Salzburg, Ljubljana, Prague, Tokyo, Seoul, Singapore, Thessalonica, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Rio de Janeiro, St. Paulo, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver amongst others. As a composer, I write chamber music, operas and film scores.

BURKE BROWN (collaborator); Recent dance designs: Aszure Barton & Artists, Ballet Nacional de Mexico. Recent opera and theater: Purcell's Dido & Aeneas (Opera Erratica, Toronto); Wickets (3LD Art & Technology Center) featured in American Theatre Magazine; The Brothers Size (NYSF-Public Theater; Studio Theatre, DC; Abbey Theater, Dublin); Hamlet (Northern Stage), Puppets Kafka (Here Arts Center); The Sacrifices (SPF- Martinson Theater); Tell Out My Soul (SPF-Anspacher Theater); Calling: An Opera of Forgiveness and Journeys, (LaMaMa ETC). As a projection designer: Giasone (Yale Baroque Opera Project); The Shot (Bone Orchard). Artist in Residence: Lighting Design at Ars Nova (2008). Wingspace Design Collective MFA, Yale.

NICOLE PEARCE (collaborator) Collaborations with Aszure Barton: Buscar (Aszure Barton & Artists), Still Life (Nederlands Dans Theater), Untouched (Hubbard Street Dance Company), Still & Happy Little Things (The Juilliard School). Other credits include: Over 10 works with Mark Morris; New Dances with Robert Battle, Adam Hougland, Nicolo Fonte, Larry Keigwin, Andrea Miller, Matthew Neenan, David Parker, Fabian Priovelle, & Doug Varone (The Juilliard School); Introdans; Boston Ballet; Joffrey Ballet; Ballet Memphis; Philadanco; & Ballet Theatre of Maryland. Selected NY credits: The American Dream & The Sandbox directed by Edward Albee; Beebo Brinker Chronicles directed by Leigh Silverman; Edgewise directed by Trip Cullman.

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Press Quotes

“one of the most innovative choreographers of this generation”

- *Mikhail Baryshnikov*

“...If you are seeking a new dance company to fall in love with, Aszure Barton & Artists just might be the one.”

- *Wendy Liberatore, Daily Gazette, March 20th, 2010*

"Having worked with the San Francisco Ballet for over fifteen years (as composer-in-residence) and with many of the greatest dancers of our time (Baryshnikov, Nureyev, Gregory Hines, Judith Jameson, Lucinda Childs...I can say with complete conviction that Aszure Barton's creations are among the most beautiful and original that I have ever seen. And what great music she chooses! She moves me!"

- *Paul Chihara, April 2011*

“Dancer-choreographer Barton has a richly theatrical sensibility that takes full advantage of the possibilities inherent in movement, music, lighting and space. Throughout the evening, she created stage pictures that confirmed her status as a peer to such esteemed choreographers as Karole Armitage, Bill T. Jones and Mark Morris.”

- *Calvin Wilson, St. Louis Today, March 29th, 2010*

“When dance lovers bemoan the dearth of choreographic talent, remember to point to Aszure Barton. This Canadian dance creator... is one to celebrate.”

- *Wendy Liberatore, Daily Gazette, March 20th, 2010*

"a gleeful and mind-blown audience responded with a standing ovation... Aszure Barton and Artists completely demolished the normally expected notion of a dance routine, replacing it with an absurd yet extraordinary performance that dazzled the audience and utterly changed the expectation of what dance should be."

- *The Anchor, Rhode Island, May 3rd, 2011*

“something I’d pick to watch over and over if I had to choose just one.”

- *Tresca Weinstein, Times Union, June 23rd, 2010*

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Press Quotes

“For her, space is theater. And I mean real, old-school theater. The kind where a performer comes out and practically opens up a vein to reach you. Because that's who he or she is. And where it's okay to lower a disco ball and send flecks of starlight spinning through the darkness of the world.”

“an astonishingly forceful, magnetic ensemble, agile and hellbent, sly and masterful, as capable of sophisticated musicality and breathtaking beauty as of cartoonish distortion.”

“...a collage of human experience”

- *Eva Yaa Asantewaa*

"Aszure's teaching, like her choreography and her dancing, is fearless. She's a risk taker and a speaker of truths."

- *Palm Beach Daily News*

“a rare instance of a dance that feels as if it were plucked straight from the choreographer’s extremely specific imagination and set, full- grown, onstage... full of surprise and humor, emotion and pain, expressed through a dance vocabulary that takes ballet technique and dismantles it to near-invisibility.”

- *Roslyn Sulcas, The New York Times*

"Surprising, meditative, thought-provoking, thought-transcending: Barton is definitely a choreographer to watch."

- *Judy Weightman, Broad Street Review, May 10th, 2011*



Photo by Julieta Cervantes

ASZURE BARTON & ARTISTS

Up-and-Comers in the Arts:

Body of Work, A Look at Choreographer

Aszure Barton

Rebecca Gross, National Endowment for the Arts

Magazine, May 2011

http://www.nea.gov/about/nearts/storyNew.php?id=01_bodyow&issue=2011_v1



Watching the choreography of Aszure Barton is like watching the physical unfurling of the human psyche. Under her direction, every muscle and nerve ending of the dancers seems emotionally charged, transformed from biological entities into agents of humor, torment, lust, and uncertainty. Equal parts explorations of movement and displays of theatricality, Barton's seductive work has earned her glowing accolades and prestigious commissions across the globe. Her own contemporary dance troupe, Aszure Barton & Artists, has solidified the 35-year-old's position as one of the discipline's most enterprising figures.

A native of Alberta, Canada, Barton began tap dancing at age three, launching an unusually active childhood filled with modern dance, ballet, musical theater, synchronized swimming, and competitive high jumping. With her friends, she would invent dance pieces, films, and skits, noting that she began choreographing her friends "when I was a teeny little person."

Although she nurtured dreams of becoming an orthodontist ("I was a fanatic about teeth and mouths," she said), it was the voice she found through choreography that proved irresistible. "I was quite shy," she said of her childhood. "When it comes to embracing a large group of people verbally, it's incredibly intimidating. With movement, expression [is] much more comfortable." She began studying at the National Ballet School in Toronto at age 14, and two years later initiated a choreography workshop with a friend that remains in place at the school. Barton eventually gravitated to modern dance for its "freedom of expression," though her varied background in dance is something she says cannot be erased from her bones or body.

After following her two older sisters to New York (both now dance with Aszure Barton & Artists), Barton fell into a familiar pattern for Big Apple newcomers, juggling dance with the financial necessity of babysitting and waitressing. Despite this somewhat uncertain footing, she founded Aszure Barton & Artists in 2002, for which she continues to serve as artistic director. "I just decided to do it one day," she recalled about her decision to start the group. "I had such a strong group of people and dancers that were excited about making something. You go, 'Okay, let's do this together. I'll lead it.' With so much momentum behind you, how can you not move forward?"

This momentum was brought to the attention of former Mark Morris dancer Ruth Davidson Hahn, and Barton was invited to perform with Hahn's company in Nebraska in 2003. While at a reception there, she met dance legend Mikhail Baryshnikov, who was performing a piece Hahn had created for him the year prior. "He said, 'So,' very nonchalantly, 'I hear you're a choreographer. I'd like to see your work.' Yeah right!" she remembered, laughing at the memory. Dismissing the comment as idle party chitchat, she was surprised to find a message from him when she returned to New York. What followed was the type of mentorship that every artist dreams of but only a lucky handful manage to secure. Barton became the first resident artist of the Baryshnikov Arts Center (BAC) in 2005, and is one of only five to have choreographed original works for BAC.

She has gone on to choreograph for a lengthy list of iconic institutions, including the Martha Graham Dance Company, American Ballet Theatre, Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, Nederlands

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Dans Theater, and the National Ballet of Canada. In 2006, Barton tackled the Great White Way when she choreographed the Broadway revival of *The Threepenny Opera*.

Although Barton said that developing trust with new dancers can be challenging, the unique dynamics of each group push Barton's work in new creative directions. She rarely arrives in the studio with a set plan, instead preferring to use the dancers' energy as a guide. "We pick up on wherever we are in that moment and build something out of nothing together," she said. "I don't have a formula, that's for sure. The people I work with are so incredibly intelligent and creative themselves that I'm really interested in the collaboration, and facilitating a space where they can bring themselves to the work."

Choreographing for other companies also influences Barton's work with her own New York-based company, which operates on a project basis rather than a full-time, daily schedule. "I've been very lucky to have the balance of my group and freelancing. We all get to venture out, collect experience, and come back. The moments [together] are really special." Barton describes her troupe as her "dream team," and the company has performed in far-flung international locales. This spring, the company will tour the U.S. and Russia, performing Barton's original productions of *Busk* and *Blue Soup*. Aszure Barton & Artists also offers residencies, master classes, and workshops, continuing the tradition of support that Barton inherited from Baryshnikov and others.

"Now that I'm in my 30s," she said, "it's really important for me to connect to younger dancers. I do not have all of the answers, but I certainly can teach something and facilitate a space that can support and teach what I know."

Because her work is so collaborative, Barton resists categorizing her choreographic style, saying that "the only consistent thing in my work is change." While her stylistic approach may be constantly evolving, Barton's basic principles remain constant. She tries to honor the people that have trusted her as director, and does what she can to create an "open dialogue" with her dancers. As for her audience, she avoids the impossible task of trying to please everyone, and instead tries to remain "as honest and true to where I am or what I'm feeling intuitively and deeply." For Barton, communicating this emotional candor establishes an honest connection with spectators, allowing them to fully embrace the world she has created onstage. "I'm trying to return to that ecstasy of pure movement, or something that makes you feel completely moved," she said. "I want to be able to return to that deeprooted absolute joy."

This emphasis on reveling in the naked emotions of a moment informs every aspect of Barton's life. When asked what else she hopes to accomplish in her already illustrious career, she demurred. "I'm not so goal-oriented in terms of thinking, 'One day I would love to do this and that.' I always bring it back to the reality of the present moment. I try to just be where I am and honor where I am."

There is perhaps no need to target specific professional milestones; her trajectory all but ensures a parade of future achievements and successes. For now, her main focus is simply to stay grounded, and appreciate what she describes as a "truly awesome life."

"I hope I can continue to be aware and remain sensitive, and continue believing in the power of creativity," said Barton. "It's [about] not becoming motivated by ego or taking work that is just for the sake of the prestige. To stay connected to why I do what I do would make me very happy."

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A Conversation with Aszure Barton
Ted Henigson's Interview for Classical TV
<http://www.classicaltv.com/the-informer/exclusive-interview-choreographer-aszure-barton>



TED HENIGSON: The title of your new work BUSK comes from the Spanish word "buscar" which means to seek.

ASZURE BARTON: Yes, it emerged in a pair of residencies that began in Santa Barbara where DANCEworks gave us this amazing opportunity to work in the Lobero Theater, purely for the process of creation. It came out of thinking about why I choose to choreograph and what my place was in the puzzle of the cities we were in-- what is the difference between us as artists on stage and the people, the birds...

TH: And the difference is that you "seek"? That flicker of the creative act?

AB: Absolutely. I am constantly searching. That's for sure. I am certainly not trying to make a statement about buskers, though the show does include elements of street performance. I'm not trying to press any kind of political statement and I'm not trying to say fuck you to anything.

TH: You are interested in an audience having their own experience, their own ideas...

AB: It's no longer yours once it leaves you. I love form but I also love seeing where an idea or a body can go, within a structure, and then letting go of that as well. BUSK has both sides. It's incredibly structured. There is a ton of musical structure and spatial structure, and a heavy influence of my experience. But overall it's a platform - I hate that word because it's so two-dimensional - but it's a space in which the dancer at the heart of it can really bring themselves to the forefront of the piece and let their own light shine.

TH: It's a dynamic living canvas, fluidly adapting to the artists that animate it, and the audience is a creative partner, not a reader but a maker, in the interpretation of the work.

AB: I love painting space and having space come to life.

TH: And I feel like we both love that full expression of dance that is at once reflective, authentic, emotionally dynamic, and yet still involves the eloquence of poetic movement on bodies that communicate in ways I love but do not know. I have seen you achieve this time and again. Skill and form are not liabilities in your work.

AB: You know that I am not opposed to entertaining the audience. Dancers love to dance. That's what I've realized. That excitement excites me and feeds my work. I recently had an open audition to get outside of my bubble and it was amazing to see all of these incredible dancers. My dancers thought, Oh God, Aszure is going to start wanting to make work for 150 people. All of them were so friggin' awesome. It was really inspiring. It's now a priority for me to start teaching in the city and opening my doors to more people.

TH: I'm reflecting on dreams you've shared in the past with me about the future of Aszure Barton & Artists. BUSK is much bigger than this performance, isn't it? It's emblematic of your desire to

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build a company around the idea of change instead of reprisal, facilitated by a diverse and shifting stream of artistic consciousnesses.

AB: It's much less interesting for me to think about going on the road and performing the same piece over and over again instead of what I can create that can be constantly evolving and changing and challenging, within a structure, which is this piece, which is exactly that. It is about allowing it to grow and change. And every time it is a finished product because it is what it is in those moments.

TH: The work adapts to the environment and the artists who shape it.

AB: Every time we've revisited BUSK it's in constant motion depending on the people that are involved. It's like a stew. Everyone that's new, that cycles into it, creates a new lineage for the work. At this point BUSK is the work of twenty amazing artists-- dancers yes, but also people from the allied arts of music, sound design, lighting, costuming, and installation art. It's awesome.

TH: It sounds a bit like the Banff Centre in Canada where you are an artist in residence and explored the second lineage of the work. I'm starting to see BUSK as the performative arm of your very own multidisciplinary creative incubator: Aszure Barton & Artists.

AB: That's the goal! That's a really good way of saying it. That's so awesome to hear. And yes. Banff is such an exciting place. It's like being at the Juilliard School but in real life, and in the Rocky Mountains. It is incredibly inspiring.

TH: In two weeks you will finally get to show BUSK, with live musicians no less(!), in your own season at the BAC which has been your New York creative home ever since Misha named you its first artist in residence.

AB: And now I want live music all the time! Knowing the Jerome Robbins Theater prior, I'd had the opportunity to go in there and dream. When I first walked in I had this epiphany of what it would be like to have live musicians. I thought oh God why don't I have more money?! Then: come on Aszure Barton: Go for it!! It's the dream scenario musically, and it was magical when the dancers got together with them...

TH: Wasn't it Misha who first introduced you to Lev Zhurbin and his Kontraband?

AB: Yes. I am informed to an endless degree by Misha's curiosity, his openness, and his support for so many artists. He gave me Lev's CD and said we shared similar hearts, and we do. I've always been infatuated with the world of Gypsy sound. And I am really drawn to the strings. Lev has an incredibly joyful presence with this underlying drama of Russian angst. I feel like I can relate to that sense of humor within darkness. We met almost right away after I heard the CD, by the grace of New York City. That's what I love about this place. You are creating your own opportunity depending on what street you are walking down. Having it manifest has been really exciting.

Ted Henigson is a visual artist and owner of Center of Motion, an acupuncture & Gyrotonic-based fitness practice in New York City.

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Look At Me
Rebecca Milzoff, New York Magazine,
December 12th, 2010
<http://nymag.com/arts/classicaldance/dance/features/70040/>



‘My dancers and I were talking the other day about how we’re like a bunch of chickens in a cage,’ Aszure Barton says with a giggle. ‘It’s an odd thing we do, entertaining people.’ The choreographer—curled up on a couch in a spartan office above the studios of the Baryshnikov Arts Center, her spindly former-ballerina legs tucked beneath her—is talking about her latest work, *BUSK*, which refers not to busking but to the word’s Spanish root, *buscar*, meaning “to seek.” The haunting piece is some of Barton’s most personal work, touching on her own insecurities onstage, but also exploring the need of performers to put themselves on display. “I enjoy being a performer—I’ll always be a clown that way—but it’s still very challenging for me to be 100 percent myself in front of an audience,” she says. “I haven’t even arrived at that point yet, which is why I love [choreography]. As a dancer, I was putting so much pressure on myself. There’s nothing worse than being onstage and having your other self watching you and judging.”

At 35, Barton is one of the most promising and consistently commissioned young choreographers in modern dance and ballet. She has the sort of infectious enthusiasm you might find in a favorite camp counselor, and her work is just as inviting: Not abstruse or overly clever, it fuses elegant fluidity with simple everyday gestures. She grew up in Edmonton, Alberta, and trained in ballet yet was always more excited about the creation of dance than the performing of it. When she was 15, Barton and her best friend started a choreographic workshop, which still exists, at Canada’s National Ballet School. She came to New York in 1999 to visit her sister (also a dancer), not intending to stay permanently, but soon found the city to be the ideal place to “discover new ways of moving and thinking.” In 2003, while performing with a group of fellow choreographers in Nebraska, she met her future mentor Mikhail Baryshnikov, another convert to modern dance. “He said, ‘I heard you’re good. I want to see your work.’ I thought, Yeah, right, I’ll never hear from him again.”

Instead, two years later, Barton became the first choreographer in the BAC, where she’d eventually create *Come In* for Baryshnikov and Juilliard dancers. “Misha’s one of the most curious people I’ve met in my life,” says Barton, who benefited from his inquiring mind while searching for music for *BUSK*. He turned her on to *Ljova* and the *Kontraband*, a gypsy ensemble led by violist Lev Zhurbin. “Misha said, ‘This guy has the same heart as you.’ Right away we put the CD on, and I fell to my knees like, Yeaaaahhhh!” She promptly reenacts this moment.

“It’s so easy to be technically good,” says Zhurbin, whose earthy, idiosyncratic rhythms drive *BUSK*’s alternating moods of loneliness and desperation. “But it’s wonderful when people put their soul into it and it weighs something, you know?”

Barton certainly values technique: “Classical form is amazing, but to break free from it is, too.” What she is determined to offer is an emotional safety often missing from the classic studio. “I give the dancers so much, but limit the direction,” allowing them to become, as she puts it, “vulnerable enough to find the courage to be exactly who they are. It’s about creating a platform where people don’t feel judged and can actually make asses of themselves a little bit.”

Baryshnikov, who has experienced her direction firsthand, describes it thus: “She looks in the dancer’s eyes when she works with them. She’s definitely trying to get under your skin, understanding what kind of person you are.” He laughs. “She likes to be a mama.”

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Exciting New Work from Baryshnikov's Company
Rachel Howard, San Francisco Chronicle, June 17th, 2006
<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/06/17/DDG6QJFB4R1.DTL>

San Francisco Chronicle
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

It used to be Mikhail Baryshnikov kept getting older while the dancers around him kept getting younger. But with his latest project, Hell's Kitchen Dance, the ballet superstar is younger, too -- at least on-screen, where footage of him as a nimble Kirov Ballet student looms as oversized as his fame.

Onstage at the intimate Zellerbach Playhouse, where this Cal Performances engagement continues through Sunday, the present-day Baryshnikov took one look at the pliant knees and fearless jumps of yesteryear and shrugged in joking defeat Thursday night, even though his current physical state is hardly impoverished. He looped through the deceptively slouchy phrases of Benjamin Millepied's "Years later" with consummate control, and even chanced a high-flying moment or two. At 58, his kinesthetic intelligence is so refined that it is possible to choose a single element of his dancing -- his hands, for instance -- and spend an entire night fascinated by the choices he makes with them.

And yet his performance is not the primary reason this program rates a must-see. Hell's Kitchen Dance is named after the Manhattan neighborhood of the recently opened Baryshnikov Arts Center, where Millepied and Aszure Barton are the first beneficiaries of Baryshnikov's initiative to foster fresh dance-making talents. Millepied may be gifted; it was difficult to tell from "Years later," which was enhanced greatly by Olivier Simola's extensive videography, but lingered in mind more as a clever star vehicle than a statement of choreographic originality.

Barton is clearly brilliant.

This became obvious toward the end of "Over/Come," the work for 13 dancers (sans Baryshnikov) that opens the evening. It's set to love songs one might imagine spilling out of a Bohemian cafe on a warm summer evening and populated by romantically disaffected hipsters in casually chic clothing. But it's the punchy movement rather than the atmosphere that keeps the dance compelling. Barton dissects phrases into tiny parts, rearranging and manipulating them into physical non-sequiturs. The result is an unpredictable chain of precise motion, punctuated by physical explosions more complex and outrageous than the best Jim Carey impersonation.

It's arranged with deft structure and stagecraft, and is packed with off-kilter touches: One man stands on his head while everyone reclines; a whole group of men swim across the stage like frogs on their bellies while a soloist pirouettes. But the emotional climax arrives when a lithe, blond Barton stands on Ian Robinson as he executes a belabored push-up. Barton's choreographic detail extends to extreme facial expressions, and her forced smile grows creepily more so with the difficulty of balancing on Robinson's back while he agonizes beneath. The layers of tension are disturbing and delicious.

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For "Come In," the closing piece, she directs her quirky style toward eloquence. The swelling strings of Vladimir Martynov's score (heard taped) are underlined by a clock-like strike of woodblock; the theme of mortality grows overwhelming but never overwrought as Baryshnikov weaves through a grove of young dancers. Barton's choreography is especially poignant in its myriad hand-to-face gestures; and ironic when folding chairs make an appearance and the decreasingly mobile Baryshnikov stands while the ensemble sits.

Much ink has been spilled over the Baryshnikov Arts Center, conceived as a multi-disciplinary playground for young artists. (In keeping with the generational emphasis, the Hell's Kitchen dancers are a mix of members from Barton's company and recent Juilliard and New York University graduates; they all look far from green, with Ariel Freedman standing out for her virtuoso solo in "Over/Come.") Will a haven for a fortunate few young choreographers yield new directions in New York dance? If Baryshnikov continues to select artists of Barton's caliber, the results will be well worth watching.



*Aszure Barton's Over/Come - Hell's Kitchen Dance
Image by Mikhail Baryshnikov*

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Choreographer is One to Watch (excerpt)

Michael Crabb, The Star (Toronto, CA), November 26th, 2009

<http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/article/731013--choreographer-is-one-to-watch>



Watch her

Choreography by Aszure Barton. With *The Four Temperaments* by George Balanchine and *Glass Pieces* by Jerome Robbins

Understandably, the most keenly anticipated work was the world premiere of *Watch her* by a rapidly ascendant choreographic star, 34-year-old Aszure Barton. Edmonton-born, New York City-based Barton counts former ballet superstar Mikhail Baryshnikov among her mentors. His confidence in her exceptional talent is solidly grounded.

Barton does not merely assemble steps pleasingly. With carefully chosen artistic collaborators she creates richly developed dances, layered with metaphor, nuance, subtle human drama and mystery.

Watch her takes us into an unsettling environment, bounded by the forbidding grey walls of Yannik Larivée's set. One of these initially blocks our view of the stage. A man, (Kevin Bowles), in dark suit, shirt and proletarian cloth cap sits on a wooden chair. He is clearly troubled; even more so when he clambers up and disappears through a square opening in the wall, which lifts to find him deposited in what could be reality, a dream or a recollection of past events.

Sonia Rodriguez, Bridgett Zehr and Heather Ogden, the leading female figures in a large cast of 18 women and 16 men, can be interpreted as sirens, lovers past and spiritual guides.

The mood is both serene and fraught, as much for the dynamic tension of the choreography, which mixes ballet virtuosity with finely detailed gestures and large, regimented ensembles with solos and smaller groupings, as for the other-worldly atmosphere engendered by composer Lera Auerbach's Pergolesi derived *Dialogues on Stabat Mater* and Christopher Dennis's eerie lighting.

Barton's ballet crackles with sexual tension too; not a battle of the sexes but a catalogue of longings, regrets, hopes and, perhaps, the occasional victim.

Watch her is sandwiched between much older ballets of contrasting styles, George Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments* (1946) and Jerome Robbins' *Glass Pieces* (1983). This does not imply that they are merely the bread to Barton's choreographic meat. Balanchine and Robbins were towering figures in 20th-century ballet.

The Four Ts – as it's known to fans – is arguably among the Russian-American choreographer's finest and remains an astounding feat of invention in which the traditional lines of classical ballet are flexed and contorted as emblems of a brave and perhaps more perplexing new world; yet not

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a necessarily grim one. Along with its commissioned Hindemith music, Balanchine's finale soars with unalloyed exultation.

Thematically Glass Pieces is enigmatic yet mesmerizing, a ballet of contrasts between the pedestrian and sublime, the public and impersonal, the private and intimate, fast and slow. Animated by, yet not enslaved to its selections of Philip Glass music, Robbins' ballet, like Balanchine's, is a true classic.



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Aszure Barton and Her Troupe Sniff Out the
Wild Essences of Life and Performance
Deborah Jowitt, The Village Voice, December
22nd, 2010



<http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-12-22/dance/aszure-barton-and-her-troupe-sniff-out-the-wild-essences-of-life-and-performance/>

I'm not surprised that Canadian choreographer Aszure Barton's new work, *Busk*, scheduled for two performances at the Baryshnikov Arts Center's Jerome Robbins Theater, ended up being shown four times last weekend. Barton is a fascinating artist. If her 2009 *One in Three* for American Ballet Theatre seemed unfulfilled, it may be that she needs more time to gestate a piece than a busy ballet company can provide. She and her dancers nurtured *Busk* for over a year, and the result grabs you by the throat. If, while waiting in the lobby before the performance, you watch footage of the piece filmed in a forest by Kevin Freeman, you can't wait for the doors to open. Who are these people in hoodies huddling in dry leaves between bare tree trunks? What clan? What troupe?

The theater presents you with another mystery. What can that dimly lit front curtain be made of? Mottled velvet? Hanging moss? Projected photos of the tribe (by Shannon DMOTE Peel) intermittently swim over its surface. Suddenly the house lights go out, and a man rises from the front row of the audience and walks through a hitherto unseen portal in the middle of the curtain/wall. Almost immediately, the whole thing falls in a pile at the audience's feet. It turns out to be made of gray, floor-to-ceiling feather boas (designer: Jon Morris), later used as nesting material to be dived into.

The word "busk" refers to the activities of street performers, although Barton, in interviews, has also aligned it with the Spanish verb *buscar*, meaning to seek or search for. References to buskers appear from time to time in the work. Eric Beauchesne's opening solo is a silky, athletic marvel, which an invisible, vaudevillian opponent (or Beauchesne's own hand) diverts without stopping the flow. He might want to talk to us, but is hit from behind. He handstands into a hat, and comes up with it on his head; seconds later, it's knocked off. In the end, he tosses it into the audience.

Often some or all of the eight performers don minstrelsy's white gloves. Jonathan Emanuell Alsberry strips off his loose-cut hoodie to perform bare-chested, and the percussion that accompanies his sinuous solo beneath a mirror ball suddenly sounds like the tap dance he isn't quite doing. Red-headed Emily Oldak—a Juilliard graduate like five of the other performers in *Busk*—has also performed with *Cirque du Soleil*, and the solo that Barton has created for her makes sensuous use of her skills as a contortionist.

But these "performances" have a strange resonance, as do the unison or contrapuntal dances for groups or couples that surround and meld with them. The mostly Russian gypsy music intensifies this ambiance with its dark strands and wild gaiety. Some of it is performed live by Ljova + the Kontraband, with violist Lev Zhurbin occasionally wandering onto the stage, and Patrick Farrell (accordion), Mathias Kunzli (percussion), and Mike Savino (bass and banjo) half visible on side balconies above the stage. Inna Barmash rises unexpectedly from the front row into a beam of

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light to sing a song in Yiddish. Additional instruments and the voices of folk choruses swell from taped selections by other composers.

The movement is arresting. The dancers veer between tautness and a loose-bodied fluidity that's emphasized by Michelle Jank's floaty layers of jackets, dresses, and pants. When the performers' legs fly high, the move looks almost inadvertent, and often they work low to the ground—their feet spraddled, their knees bent, their hips swinging, their bodies whirled through the air like tumbleweeds. Sharp little gestures and switches of attention punctuate this—whether it's a dancer pointing a finger at us or three men sticking out their tongues as they go.

The slightly eerie ambiance is compounded by Barton's frequent emphasis on the group as spectators. Sometimes, hoodies on, they sit, stiff as dolls, on a small flight of steps that's part of the scenery and watch. During one part, Andrew Murdock looks on from a nest in the wooden beams to the audience's right. After Cynthia Salgado has stripped down to a halter top and skirt and performed a compelling solo, a hooded male dancer brings her white gloves, and they go along together—she walking, he crawling, then vice versa; Beauchesne then enters and applauds them. While Oldak, wearing almost nothing, does her number, the remaining seven performers lie prone on opposite sides of the square of light that skilled lighting designer Nicole Pearce has designated as Oldak's stage. For the performer's final foot-behind-the-neck trick, they swarm around her; but as soon as Zhurbin walks on, playing his viola so furiously that broken strings fly out from his bow, they leave her and flock to him.

The choreographer knows her performers well and presents them skillfully and lovingly to us: Stephan Laks, Evan Teitelbaum, Charlaine Katsuyoshi, Jenna Fakhoury, in addition to those mentioned—all get to display their distinctive vividness onstage.

That Barton chose to end *Busk* with a brief reprise of the walking-the-dog motif seen earlier sums up her images of life as performance and both as a constant search for the ineffable. Laks crawls up to Salgado and embraces her from behind. The two of them are exiting as the lights fade—he crawls, she walks; perhaps, in the dark, she crawls, he walks. Sniffing out the future.



D'oh! - Aszure Barton by George Lange

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Touring Repertoire
BLUE SOUP (2009)



Photo by Donald Lee, courtesy of the Banff Centre

Music by various artists

Lighting Design Burke Brown
Costume Design Fritz Masten

Aszure Barton creates dense settings in which each player is an individual and yet all are united by a common language. *Blue Soup* is a collection drawn from Barton's notable past creations. Defying the idea of dance as simple spectacle, this robust work invites the audience to visit a self-contained, deeply textured and absurd universe of bright joy and dark humor. *Blue Soup* is an autobiographical work celebrating a partnership between movement and music, that offers an entire world full of surprise.

CREDIT: Aszure Barton & Artists acknowledges the assistance of the Performing Arts Residency program at The Banff Centre (Banff, Canada) in the development of BLUE SOUP.



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Touring Repertoire

BUSK

Music by Ljova and the Kontraband with additional music by various artists

Costume Design Michelle Jank
Lighting Design Nicole Pearce
Lighting Supervisor Phillip Burke Brown
Projected Images Shannon DMOTE Peel
Creative Design Collaborator Jon Morris
Film Footage Kevin Freeman
Film Editing Jeremy Jurin (courtesy of Nitrous Ltd.)
Graphic Design DMOTE

The word "busk" comes from the Spanish root word "buscar", meaning "to seek".



Photo by Donald Lee, courtesy of the Banff Centre

*CREDIT: BUSK was co-commissioned by The Banff Centre (Banff, Canada), Danceworks (Santa Barbara), and the Ringling International Arts Festival, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (Sarasota, FL) in association with the Baryshnikov Arts Center (New York, NY). Busk was been made possible by generous support from Danceworks, Santa Barbara, and the Creative Residency Program at The Banff Centre. Additional support has been provided by the Howard Gilman Foundation and The Canada Council for the Arts. *Thank you to Mikhail Baryshnikov, Stanford Makishi, Kelly Robinson, and Dianne Vapnek for believing in and supporting this project.*

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Touring Repertoire
LES CHAMBRES DES JACQUES (2006)



*Music by Gilles Vigneault, Antonio Vivaldi, Les Yeux Noirs, The Cracow
Klezmer, Alberto Iglesias*

LES CHAMBRES DES JACQUES establishes a form of dialogue between the choreographer and dancers, an almost interactive exploration, focused on a human dimension that oscillates between daily life and the grotesque, the banal and the unexpected. Exploring all forms and shapes of the individual down to the roots of her animal physicality, Aszure Barton has interwoven her piece with the personal habits and styles which she has observed among dancers, details which make up their individual personalities, and those marvelous little imperfections which speak of the beauty and fragility of being.

This piece was originally created for Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal in 2006.

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Photo by Donald Lee, courtesy of the Banff Centre

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