

POST- PANDEMIC HOPES



indefatigable force behind SPCD, who was speaking to me from Germany where a group from the company was on tour. Another group was performing simultaneously back home in Brazil.

Bogéa was happy to be back in Europe after two years, and full of optimism for the new season. She read me a poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade (*Côr do Arcoíris – Colours of the Rainbow*), which talks about the real meaning of a new year, and that was the inspiration behind her new season. “I have high hopes,” Bogéa declared, laughing. “We are living in challenging times that demand flexibility and positive energy. Above all, we need to connect with our dancers more than ever. As a team [there are 32 permanent dancers and, in December, they hired more for every production], we discovered solutions to our problems, and how to stay active with this new model. We did a lot of soul searching, individually and collectively. As SPCD records everything, it allowed us to revise and enrich our digital history, too. We danced in empty spaces, starting with our own facilities, then in abandoned buildings in other towns. Dancers created pieces for their colleagues and invited friends to choreograph for them; they experimented with the technical disciplines of our work. There was a lot of learning too. Video-dance ended up providing the space for experimentation by a new generation of choreographers, which is also part of our mission statement”, the leader of the versatile company explained. She is also promoting choreographers

Dance companies in Latin America presented a varied reaction to the challenges of the pandemic. Lockdowns and vaccinations worked differently from country to country, even region to region in the case of Brazil, where one company had a constant presence. São Paulo Companhia de Dança (SPCD) worked during lockdown with a mixture of digital programmes and theatre performances, with and without a live audience. Thanks to the constant film documentation of its work since SPCD was founded 13 years ago, creating digital material is almost in its DNA.

The company performed in places such as São Paulo’s Museum of Contemporary Art for *Amalgama*, and the city streets for *Nuvens*. It live-streamed beautiful galas and exquisite classical programmes that included *Giselle* and *Les Sylphides*, and contemporary mixed bills with recent and new works by Henrique Rodovalho, Esdras Hernández, Cassi Abranches, Antonio Gomes and Nacho Duato. Scores of educational and fun videos for families and schools were produced, and dancers performed in hospices and clinics whilst respecting coronavirus restrictions. During a European tour in November last year, the company launched the video *Marmóreo*, a pas de deux created

Fátima Nollén finds out how Latin American dance companies have been returning to the stage

online by Stephen Shropshire to music by Scarlatti that was supported by the government of The Netherlands.

“There is no comparison to performing on stage for an audience,” says director Inês Bogéa, the



of African descent such as Leilane Teles, who created *Umbó* last year.

"The 2022 season is about hope for a new year, and about the relationship between humanity and nature revealed by the pandemic", she says. Starting this month, six new works and four pieces from the repertoire will be performed at different theatres in São Paulo. Brazil's culture and people, music by Villalobos and paintings by Di Cavalcanti will be present in new ballets inspired by the legacy of modernism in Brazil.

This spring sees SPCD touring to France and performing in Montreal. There will also be a run of performances of Mario Galizzi's version of *Swan Lake* and the premiere of Marcia Haydée's staging of *The Nutcracker*. "I really want this season to be the colours of the rainbow," Bogéa admits.

Meanwhile in Chile, it took Luis Ortigoza 17 months to make his directorial debut with Teatro Municipal's Ballet de Santiago (BdS) in September 2021. The Argentinian took up the post left vacant by Marcia Haydée. Ortigoza was her assistant for many years, and he has asked Haydée to remain as an international advisor.

I spoke to the former étoile whilst he was working on his own version of *The Nutcracker* for performances last month. "I thought our audience needed a fresh vision after 15 years of dancing the previous version," Ortigoza says. "I always imagined the snowflake scene having men in it too, more like a snow-storm, and setting the production during Tchaikovsky's time in Russia, Fabergé eggs included, but respecting Marius Petipa's libretto."

After months working from home and adjusting for its comeback to the theatre, the company's encounter with the audience "was fantastic" despite reduced numbers and part of the orchestra playing in the stalls. "Since last January I had been working on our programme *Tríptico +1* as if it was going to be streamed. Coronavirus cases were high, we had many lockdowns, but the vaccination programme, which commenced in February, worked out in the end. Instead of what I planned – a big production that put my stamp on the opening of the season – the pandemic forced me to accept the new rules of the game, rethink, be flexible, make do. It's bad for one's

including Brazilian Andreza Randizek, or they decided to embark on new career paths, like principal José Manuel Ghiso, who took up the reins of his alma mater Incolballet (the school and three dance companies) in Cali, Colombia. His wife, the Chilean étoile Natalia Berríos, will be his assistant director and teacher there. "We had a proper send-off for Andreza, and now I am thinking of creating a programme for Natalia; all dancers need to close their stage careers with respect. This also allows for renewal within the company," Ortigoza says. "It was particularly challenging to keep the young dancers motivated. Careers are short and time flies; emotionally it was hard for the corps de ballet."

Ortigoza wishes to maintain the classical tradition of the company whilst opening it up to new choreographers in an attempt to broaden the repertoire. "2022 is our 63rd season and I want to keep alive the artistic legacy of former directors Ivan Nagy [once a principal with American Ballet Theatre] and Marcia Haydée, through two of their productions". The new season will include, for the first time, a piece by Jifí Kylián and Ortigoza's version of *Giselle*.

A wonderful surprise for many in June 2021 was the appointment of Thiago Soares as director of the Ballet de Monterrey (BdM) in Mexico. Even before the Brazilian dancer retired from The Royal Ballet, he had been exploring this option as his next step, which he says has left him "with no personal life but very happy". Soares spoke to me via Zoom from sunny Mexico.

During the height of the pandemic, BdM had Cuban ballet master Luis Serrano as interim director. Since Soares' arrival many changes have been introduced. The company performed an outdoor gala programme at the *Festival de Santa Lucía*, which included two creations by Soares, *Sonatina* (first seen with The Royal Ballet) and *Carousel* (originally choreographed for the Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio de Janeiro), alongside works by Serrano and Spanish choreographer Diego Landin, and extracts from *Swan Lake* and *Le Corsaire*. Soares thinks a ballet company "always needs to have old and new things in the repertoire. Programming the company's work in ➤



Opposite top: São Paulo Companhia de Dança in Act II of *Giselle*.
Opposite bottom: Ballet de Santiago in Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Requiem para una rosa*.
Above: Thiago Soares rehearsing dancers from the Ballet de Monterrey.

ego," he laughs. Like SPCD, Ortigoza worked via Zoom with choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa on *Requiem para una rosa*, "which was a whole new experience and a success."

During the pandemic, several principal dancers retired from BdS,

chunks, just in case, seemed sensible”, Soares told me. “I’m the new guy learning to do the job, so I didn’t want to try anything too crazy. I also needed to follow all COVID-19 protocols by the book”, he confessed with a cheeky grin. “We have managed to do everything I planned, such as reorganising the work dynamics, from timetabling to making difficult changes, and testing



everyone three times a month in a less expensive way. The good thing is that our dancers are very enthusiastic. The challenge was to inform the audience that it was safe to return to our performances,” he explained.

I asked him how much freedom he has had to design the season, considering the company’s founder, philanthropist Yolanda Santos, is known for her very firm ideas of what BdM should be. “She was very open to my vision during several conversations and visits before I was appointed. She is a very interesting person, and I am willing to give it my best,” he answered.

Monterrey performed its traditional version of *The Nutcracker* in December, and after a break will reconvene for an ambitious 2022 season. For a forthcoming triple bill, Soares has invited Lauren Lovette, former New York City Ballet dancer-turned-choreographer, “to create something fresh with an interesting language”; he has also commissioned a work from Mexican choreographer and dancer Julio Barrios, and a new piece from Diego Landin. “They represent the youth of this new generation,” Soares added.



A full-length *Swan Lake* will have Soares’ “own humble touch and a new production, including guest coaches to prepare the dancers”. He plans to mount a new production of *Le Corsaire* next July. One important consideration for him is “to develop a digital programme, as BdM has been very timid so far.” How has the company reacted to him? “It’s a group of interesting, real people who work hard, have families, other jobs. I’m touched by the way they have opened-up to me. I’m conscious I can’t do this alone, but with all of them. We expect to have 52 dancers employed by the company soon. On the other hand, I’m having fun in this second act of my career.”

In Uruguay, Maria Noel Ricetto replaced Igor Yebra as artistic director at Ballet Nacional del Sodre (BNS) in January 2021. She planned for “a flexible season” while continuing to create digital content. Despite some postponements, BNS has been able to perform Mauricio Wainrot’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as a programme created by the dancers during a choreographic workshop in July. September and October saw a run of Franco Ventimiglia’s *The Wizard of Oz*, and the year ended with a tour to ten cities and the return of *The Nutcracker* staged by former Colón principal Silvia Bazyllis.

“I’m so happy with the company; 2021 was a lot of ‘stop-and-play’, so I look towards 2022 with hope,” Ricetto says. “This season is based on what I’d like to dance or be challenged by.

Above: Ballet del Sodre’s Paula Penacchio, Sergio Muzzio, Acao Theophilo and Lucas Moya in *The Wizard of Oz*. Left: São Paulo Companhia de Dança in Antonio Gomes’ *Madrugada*.

It’s also the first I programmed fully and will open with *Giselle*, a ballet close to my heart, restaged by Sara Nieto. Uruguayan like me, she was an étoile at the Ballet de Santiago. We will have the first inclusive piece created by Ingrid Molinos – director of Young Amici in London – for five able-bodied dancers and five people with disabilities, which will be included in the *Festival Sin Límites* [Festival Without Limits]. Dance is for everyone, so I think this is exciting. Two productions are coming to us from the Ballet de Santiago: Marcia Haydée’s *Firebird*, which is exquisite, and Luis Ortigoza’s version of *Raymonda*. Luis was the first person I called when I became director. We performed together in the past and I adore Marcia’s work and how she works with dancers.”

There will also be a classical gala and a mixed bill of contemporary works including a piece by Marina Sánchez that is inspired by *Les Sylphides*, and Ohad Naharin’s *Minus 16*. “Naharin will travel to us to work”, says Ricetto. “I never dreamed he would answer my email. Also, because we need a box office success, we’ll bring back our production of *Swan Lake* for Christmas, staged by former Colón principal Raúl Candal.” ■