

2017 Mentorship Program protégé Robert Binet on working with mentor Karen Kain

Since beginning my mentorship with Karen, I have had the privilege to work with her on a variety of projects. In October, we toured my immersive ballet, *The Dreamers Ever Leave You*, to London where we presented it with a mixed cast of dancers of The National Ballet of Canada and The Royal Ballet. The ballet was inspired by the work of Lawren Harris, which is so well known to Canadians and relatively unknown in the UK, so audiences were looking at the work with a very different context. We took the work from the intimate, pristine space at the Art Gallery of Ontario where the work premiered in 2016, to a massive former printing press factory. It was interesting to see the work shift as it molded to this cavernous, industrial space and to the different movement style of the Royal Ballet dancers. The next phase of development for this ballet is that I will be reworking it for the Four Seasons Centre stage. This was Karen's idea and it provides a really interesting challenge to convey the same ideas in a completely different space and format. I won't be able to recreate the intimacy or immersive experience that we had at the AGO and in London. However, it feels appropriate to be exploring Harris' work on such a large stage because of the vastness of the landscapes he painted and the canvases on which he painted them.

Karen has also made me responsible for The National Ballet of Canada's Choreographic Workshop which culminated recently in two performances. I was responsible for creating the format of the workshop and we involved dancers within the company who are interested in choreographing, and for the first time, two independent choreographers from outside the company - Alysa Pires and Hanna Kiel. We also brought in Canadian dance legends Peggy Baker and Laurence Lemieux to act as mentors to the choreographers which added a fantastic level of professional development to the project for us all. It was my first time being responsible for a project that did not involve my own choreography and it was a fantastic learning experience. I got to work with a wide range of artists, and departments within the National Ballet I wouldn't otherwise come in to contact with and I'm really excited about the new skills I've developed through this project.

I have also been working intensely developing my new adaptation of *Orpheus* for The National Ballet of Canada, which forms the centre of the mentorship programme. I have a brilliant team consisting of a librettist, composer, set designer and lighting designer, and we have all been working closely together to adapt the myth in a way that makes most sense for our world today, but that also acknowledges the fact that this is a story that has been told across cultures for thousands of years. Karen has been extremely helpful in finding the right shape and pacing for the work as she's able to draw on the immense number of productions she's been a part of, both as a dancer and director. It is an extraordinary gift to work with someone who is so knowledgeable, experienced and enamoured with this incredible art form.