

Margie Gillis

dancer and choreographer

biographical notes – long version

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Internationally acclaimed modern dance artist, dancer/choreographer Margie Gillis has been creating original works for over thirty-five years. Her repertoire now includes more than one hundred pieces which she performs as solos and nearly a dozen duets and group pieces.

Born in Montreal to a family of accomplished athletes, Margie Gillis could not have wished for a better environment in which to develop her talent. Showing a passion for dance early in life, she began ballet and gymnastic lessons at the age of three. In her youth, she trained and rehearsed on her own and later continued to learn in classes with such prominent teachers as May O'Donnell, Linda Rabin, Lynda Raino and Allan Wayne. Over the years, this charismatic dancer has developed a remarkable personal style.

In 1979, Margie Gillis was invited to teach and give lectures in Maoist China, thus becoming the first artist from the West to introduce modern dance in that country after the Cultural Revolution. Two years later, she founded her own company, the Margie Gillis Dance Foundation with the mission to support and present her artistic work. Her international tours have taken her to Asia, India, Europe and the Middle East as well as across North and South America.

In parallel to her solo work and on a regular basis, Margie Gillis collaborates on projects initiated by her peers. She participated in the creation of two of Martha Clarke's major pieces in which she danced principal roles. She has performed with The Paul Taylor Dance Company in pieces created by her brother, the late dancer/choreographer Christopher Gillis. With Les Grands Ballets canadiens de Montréal, she danced the role of Miss Lucy in James Kudelka's *Dracula*. She has also been a guest artist with the National Ballet of Canada, Ballet British Columbia and American companies such as Momix and The Bruce Wood Dance Company. She has collaborated with many other important artists in the world of dance, most notably with John Butler, Paul-André Fortier, Pauline Koner, Peggy Baker, Robbie LaFosse, Joao Mauricio, Tedd Robinson, Rina Schenfeld, Paola Styron, Rex Harrington, Risa Steinberg, Veronica Tennant and Emily Molnar. In Canada, she has shared the stage with Quebec soprano, Suzie Leblanc. And, recently, she has toured in *Sacred Ellington* with the celebrated opera singer, Jessye Norman.

Margie Gillis has been seen on television and in theatrical films on several occasions. Her life and her art have been the subjects of several documentary films, the most notable being Veronica Tennant's *Wild Hearts in Strange Times*. For her participation in this film, Margie Gillis was awarded the 1998 Gemini Prize for Best Performing Artist on Film. Among other collaborations in film or television projects, Margie Gillis choreographed the *Delilah* sequence for John Turturro's film *Romance and Cigarettes* and danced the principal role in José Navas' choreographic film *Adela, mi amor*.

Margie Gillis also creates for other performing artists. She has choreographed works for companies such as Coleman Lemieux & Company, The Bruce Wood Dance Company and the Alberta Ballet

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Company. In 2006, the Cirque du Soleil commissioned her for two solos for the Las Vegas production of *LOVE*, a tribute to the legendary Beatles and their music. The world premiere of *M.Body.7*, a group piece Margie Gillis created to celebrate her 35th anniversary season, was performed in January 2008, at the Festival Montréal en lumière.

Her most recent creation, *Thread*, explores the challenges and miracles woven daily into the complex lace of our path towards maturity and letting-go. It premiered at the National Arts Centre of Canada in 2010.

Teaching is an important aspect of Margie Gillis' career. She offers workshops for dance professionals and students in various cities throughout the world, including New York where she has taught at the prestigious Juilliard School.

Margie Gillis is an Honorary Cultural Ambassador for both the Quebec and Canadian governments. In 1988, she was the first modern dance artist to be awarded the Order of Canada. In 2001, she received a Career Grant from the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* for her exceptional contribution to Quebec culture. In the Fall of 2008, Margie Gillis was chosen by the Stella Adler Studio of New York to receive their first MAD Spirit Award for her involvement in various social causes, and she was awarded the Walter Carsen Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts by a jury of her peers at the Canada Council for the Arts. In June of 2009, Margie Gillis was appointed Knight of the Ordre national du Québec. In May 2011, she received the Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award from the Governor General's Performing Arts Award Foundation.

Margie Gillis is a socially committed artist. She has been spokesperson for a number of organizations dedicated to the fight against AIDS as well as for OXFAM and the Planned Parenthood Foundation.

Over the years, Margie Gillis has won over loyal audiences with her masterful interpretation of the different facets of the human soul. Steadfastly, she continues to develop her work through experimenting, teaching and creating.

"I choreograph and dance from a place deep inside, in order to make visible the imagery that lives in my body. I endeavor to bring to light and to work with the essential, vulnerable and authentic parts of our nature. I have always been fascinated by the miraculous links that exist between physical expression and the intellect, between emotions and spirituality. Dance... a means to catharsis, transformation and discovery."
— Margie Gillis

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