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A WA icon loops the loop

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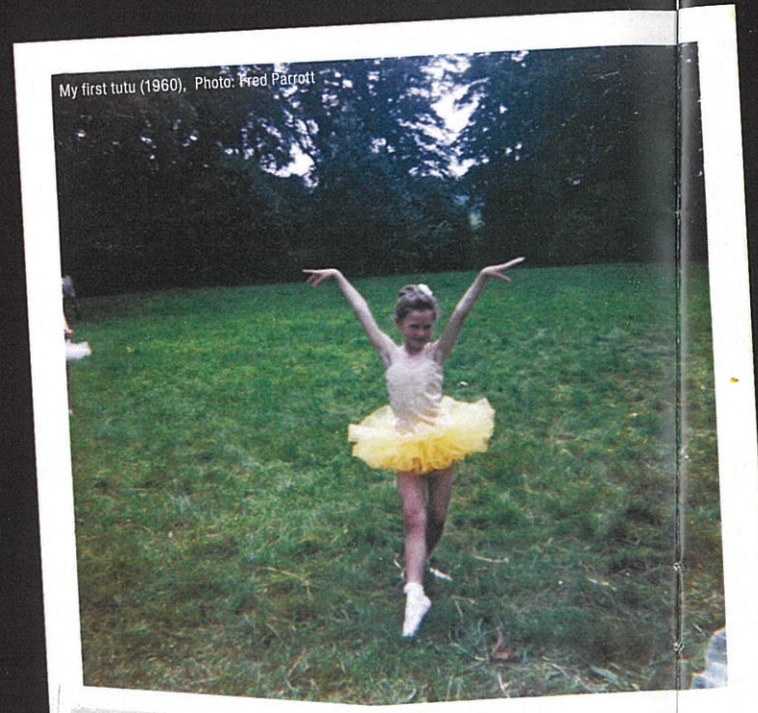
A WA icon loops the loop

Chrissie Parrott is an artist as eclectic as she is celebrated. One of the key figures of WA dance over the last four decades, Parrott was recently honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2014 West Australian Dance Awards. But for a woman of such prodigious achievements, she's also incredibly forthcoming about her artistic process. This was Vahri McKenzie's recent experience when she interviewed Parrott for Edith Cowan University's research project Moving Knowledge, which responds to *With A Bullet: the Album Project* (Nat Cursio).

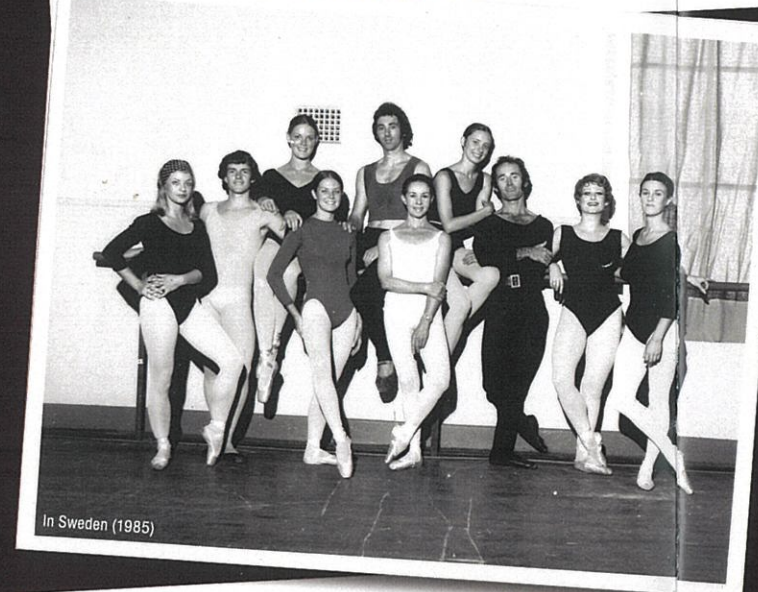


Off to tap class (1958), Photo: Fred Parrott

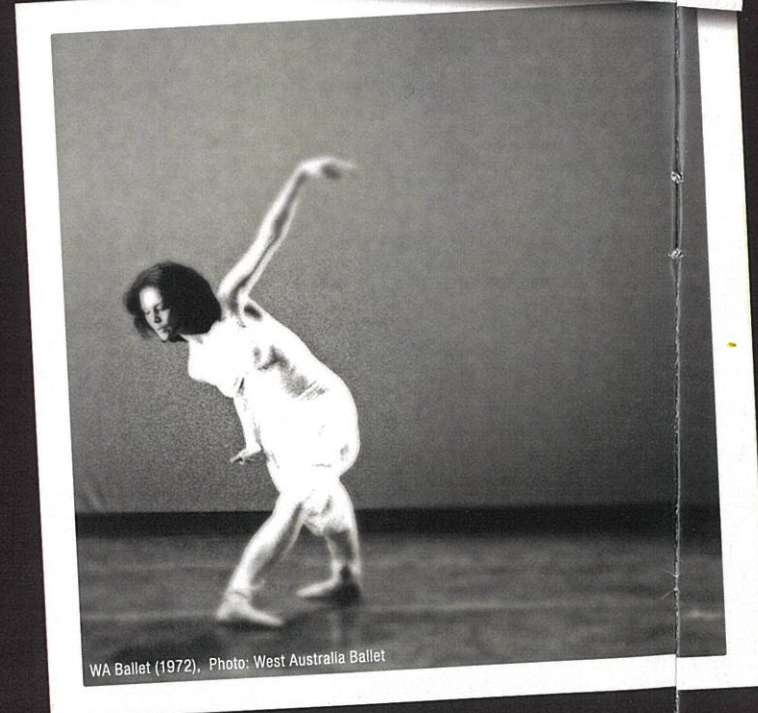
Over her forty-year career, Chrissie Parrott has worked in ballet and contemporary dance and has made work for several high-profile companies international and Australian companies including Tanz-Forum, Australian Dance Theatre and West Australian Ballet. Since 1986 she has directed her own companies, including the famed Chrissie Parrott Dance Company and currently produces work as Chrissie Parrott Arts.



My first tutu (1960), Photo: Fred Parrott



In Sweden (1985)



WA Ballet (1972), Photo: West Australia Ballet

When Parrott was invited to join in the second stage development of the Perth Edition of *With a Bullet: The Album Project*, she invoked memories of summer holidays in her birthplace Yorkshire England. Seaside resorts like Blackpool with its iconic pier on the north-west coast of England was where at the age of nine she won her first talent contest, singing and tap dancing to Shirley Temple's *Animal Crackers*.

"This is a very strong memory because it's so alien from my Australian memories. I came here when I was eleven. I have a touch of vaudeville and old time dance halls in my DNA, the essence of which often it finds its way into my choreographic work."

The Album Project challenges choreographers to create original choreography to the first piece of music for which they ever 'made up a dance', and offers researchers a glimpse into history and the creative methods employed by choreographic artists. Parrott was particularly revealing in regards to her relationship to music and her perspective on changes in studio practices in the world of dance.

Early in her career she danced with a number of large companies that offered a less intimate relationship with big name guest choreographers. "Tanz Forum for example, was a company of thirty dancers, a very different studio experience to that of the independent sector today, who generally

have a more intense and direct relationship with the choreographer." Parrott loved the rigour of this and was especially excited when working with Dutch choreographer Hans van Manen, in the early 1980s. "It was about the music, the architecture of the score, the rhythmic patterns and virtuosic speed, and it was about 'absolutely' getting it right."

Parrott comes from a tradition wherein choreographers when commissioned are usually given an orchestral piece of music and expected to work with the whole and complete score. But for *Animal Crackers* ['loop de loop'] a different approach was required. She used Garage Band to chop the piece of music around and allowed it to evolve with the dance work.

Generally, though, Parrott enjoys developing music and movement together in a sophisticated and nuanced collaboration. "I am in the very fortunate position of working closely with composer Jonathan Mustard, we frequently collaborate as part of the creative process, with movement and music evolving together."

In Parrott's work, the key is 'multi-layering', her word to describe the process of creation from a seed of an idea to the finished theatrical piece. "Multi-layering is about the emotional,

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the physical, the imaginary, the holographic. I imagine many transparent layers that have little cracks in them that allow the ideas to surface to the top and it's the top layer that I use. I'll start with a raw idea, very fundamental and simplistic." Often the starting point will be text, an image, or a song lyric in the case of *Animal Crackers*.

Textual and visual ideas coalesce with emotional, imaginary and physical patterns, and finally theatrical sets will be conceived and built in the same way. A complex series of physical conversations take place between the director's vision and how the dancers interpret that. Parrott says, "I will demonstrate what I would like the dancers to interpret and then negotiate and supplement what they're doing." At the same time, she adds, "my physicality has changed now that I'm in my 60s and I'm unable to perform in the studio as I did in my 20s. As I get older I collaborate with people, developing and recycling ideas continually until I'm happy with the composition of the work."

Old school rigour combines with task based collaboration to build a finished work, one layer at a time. "Building a holographic image in a studio with a group of extremely talented dancers is such a privilege. We journey into a world of imagination where we find those magical moments together. What a Joy!"



Rorender (2009), Photo: Eva Fernandez