

## BALLET PIXELLE presents the original ballet

## Degas

Story, Animations, Choreography by Inarra Saarinen

Music composed and performed by Kurt Bestor/Kurt Jano

Set Paintings by Edgar Degas

#### Dancers

AbaBrunkh Aabye Amelie Dibou Aiyana Tripsa Deyna Broek Luci Yokosuka Neena Botanical Sherrell Hird Skippy Flossberg Vivienne Darcy

MCs- AbaBrunkh Aabye, Sherrell Hird, Skippy Flossberg MC Coordinator - Skippy Flossberg

Sound Engineer - Willis Rossini, Neena Botanical Costume Creator - Amelie Dibou

Ballet Mistress - Amelie Dibou Ballet Coordinator - Vivienne Darcy

Web Master (http://balletpixelle.org) - Skippy Flossberg

Ushers - Adele Halcali, Alexa Sideways, Anaid Daviau Usher Coordinator - Anaid Daviau

Set Consultant - Mark Cassini Roadie & Builds - Espresso Saarinen Artistic Director - Inarra Saarinen

## DEGAS SYNOPSIS

The time is the turn of the century, The subject is the ballet. The view is painting. Edgar Degas, known for his paintings of ballet dancers, has given us a window in which to see ballet at this time of history. But what is behind the paintings?

Let us explore how one art influences another. See what Second Life and our virtual world can do for movement. Degas' paintings come to life!

Choreography by Inarra Saarinen. Music by Kurt Bestor.

**ACT SUMMARIES** 

ACT I: Ballet Class

Scene: "Foyer de Danse à l'Opéra de la rue Le Peletier", 1872 (oil on wood)

We see what really was behind Degas' painting of "The Opera Dance Studio on the Rue Le Peletier"?

ACT II: Dress Rehearsals

Scene 1: "Little Dancer Aged Fourteen", 1921

[Wax sculpture of Marie van Goethem - - modeled in 1880, exhibited in 1881 (the only sculpture Edgar Degas ever exhibited since all others were deemed unsuitable)]

What was Degas famous "Little Dancer" based on? What would happen if she could dance today? Does the standing statue yearn to dance with her dancing older sisters?

Scene 2: A triptych of three of Degas' painting.

On your left is Degas' "Two Dancers on the Stage", 1874; in the center is "L'Etoile (La danseuse sur la scene)", 1878 (pastel on pink paper), and on your right is "Blue Rehearsal", 1875 (gouche and pastel on canvas).

What if they could all dancer together?

ACT III: The Performance

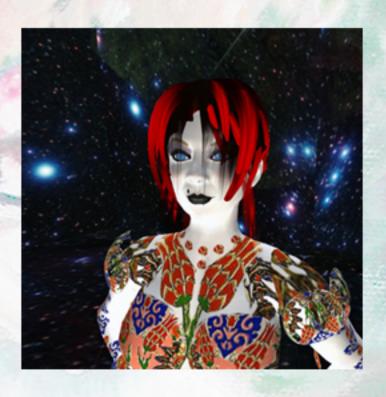
Scene: "Les danseuses en violet les jupes, les bras levés", 1900 (pastel, chalk & charcoal on tracing paper)

And finally, after the ballet classes and the rehearsals, we see the result of all of the work: the performance.

Here we see "Two Dancers in Violet". And a miraculous mixture of a Second Life dancer in the movie of the painting dancing with a live Second Life dancer!

## **Ballet Pixelle Company**

AbaBrukh Aabye Adele Halcali Aiyana Tripsa Alexa Sideways Amelie Dibou Anaid Daviau Asami Larsson Calia Cachin Deyna Broek Derrick Perl Espresso Saarinen Hanna Wahwah Inarra Saarinen Luci Tokosuka Mark Cassini **Мо Нах** Neena Botanical Sherrell Hird Skippy Flossberg Solary Clary Sophie Lavecchia The Absinthe Fairey Vivienne Darcy



## Inarra Saarinen director / choreographer

Ms. Saarinen is the founder and artistic director of Ballet Pixelle (formerly Second Life Ballet). She is also a First Life dancer and choreographer for stage, film, and video. She is interested in exploring the unique capabilities and intersection of movement in virtual and physical space and investigating and developing an aesthetic and vocabulary of virtual dance -- whether it be by tiger, dragon, bird, or human.



#### Kurt Bestor/Kurt Jano

composer / musician

For more than a three decades, Kurt Bestor's film scores, television themes, compositions and carols have provided an indelible soundtrack of American life. Indeed, much of Bestor's own life has been dedicated to creating musical parallels to visual images.

The performer launched his career writing music for television and movies. His credits include more than 40 film scores and more than 40 themes for national TV programs and commercials. It is Bestor's music that has introduced NFL Monday Night Football, and National Geographic Explorer; he scored TBS's Wild! Life Adventures and the IMAX film "The Great American West." He also was given the Outstanding Film Score Award at the New York Film and Television Festival for his music for PBS's "A More Perfect Union." Bestor was awarded an Emmy® for his collaboration with Sam Cardon on the original music for ABC's coverage of the 1988 Winter Olympics.





# AbaBrukh Aabye

Attending the first performance of Olmannen, Mr. Aabye was entranced with the process and performance of virtual ballet, but other activities prevented a deeper connection with the Company until he became friends with one of the ballerinas. One performance was enough to revive his fascination; after two, he had no choice but to join.

AbaBrukh trained in tap and other dance as a child, was on the stage from the age of 6, and was a performing member of the Swedish Folk Dance Club of Boston as well as a life-long lover of ballet, opera, and all performing arts.

Since Mr. Aabye was not been able to pursue archaeology as a career, he is making up for it by creating Virtual Abyssinia in Second Life to restore ancient and traditional buildings, including sites where he excavated in First Life.



### Aiyana Tripsa dancer

Ms. Tripsa says that dance and music are her life's blood. In First Life, she began dance classes at age 5, music at age 7, and theater at age 9. If she's not dancing she is probably listening to music or playing her piano. For the past decade, Ms. Tripsa has been studying Flamenco dance and hopes to bring all that experience to dancing in Second Life. She is nervous and excited and absolutely thrilled to be dancing with Ballet Pixelle because it combines so many of her loves.



### Amelie Dibou ballet mistress / dancer

Ms. Dibou has danced with Ballet Pixelle for 3 years, with leading and supporting roles in all 8 ballets. She also serves as Ballet Mistress, mastering all parts and rehearsing the dancers and also builds and scripts sets. Founder of DiBoutanicals, DiBoutique and Terpsichore's - many of her botanical creations and Ballet Costumes have been featured in Ballet Pixelle productions. As a dancer, musician, and naturalist in first life, Amelie loves developing these arts in Second Life.



## Deyna Broek dancer

Ms. Broek is a 32 year old Californian who is a lover of dance and music. She is from a family that is into the Arts. Ms. Broek is an Elementary school teacher and loves teaching and loves teaching her students to dance.



## Luci Tokosuka dancer

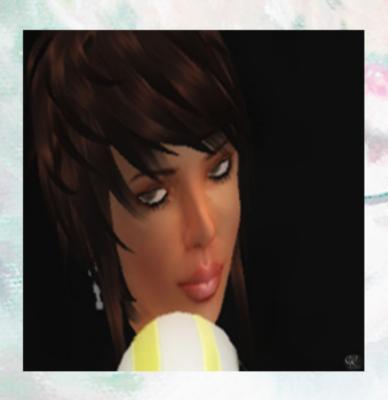
Ms. Yokosuka is a Balinese gamelan player as well as a manager of the Students' Union of the University of Human Arts and Sciences, and a VWBC newscaster.



# Neena Botanical dancer / sound

Ms. Botanical has been involved with Ballet Pixelle since it's first production. She has been a lead dancer in numerous ballets including "Olmannen", "Windows", "The Nut", and "Shuzenji". She has also helped out as MC, stage manager, set person, usher

In Second Life, when not dancing with Ballet Pixelle, she enjoys riding her horses, modeling, building, and historical role play.



## Sherrell Hird mistress of ceremonies / dancer

Ms. Hird's interest in dance was sparked when she was 5 years old. Since then she has loved everything about the arts. When she entered into Second Life and found that it had a ballet she liked it even more. From watching her very first ballet, "Olmannen", she was hooked and knew that she wanted to be a part of the Company.



## Skippy Flossberg web master / mc coordinator / dancer

Mr. Flossberg manages the Ballet Pixelle web site at http://www.balletpixelle.org/, is also the MC Coordinator, and sweeps up after the shows! He is also, at times, a dancer.



## Vivienne Darcy ballet coordinator / dancer

Ms. Darcy is dancing for joy at the opportunity to don her toe shoes for Ballet Pixelle! She is from Colorado and when not skiing loves to dance!







Ms. Halcali is an usher for Ballet Pixelle. She has ushered for Shuzenji, Les Fleurs Rose, Living Goddess, and now Degas. Ms. Halcali is also a model in Second Life.



Ms. Daviau started with Ballet Pixelle as an usher and is now Usher Coordinator. The ushers provide the key technical and courteous interface that allows our audience to enjoy the ballets.



## Espresso Saarinen builder, roadie

Mr. Saarinen is an over-attenuated computer scientist in First Life, which has given him a small leg up in the various tasks of building, scripting, and general technical work to assist the ballet. He produces the playbill and is the builder of Ballet Pixelle's Theatres.



### Mark Cassini set hud architect

Ms. Cassini is the set HUD architect and set consultant for Ballet Pixelle. He enjoys finding new and different avatars in Second Life; the snow leopard is still his favorite. He has a sensitive and artistic bent, enjoys making new friends, and making himself generally useful. When given a chance, Mark enjoys exploring scripting and building in Second Life.



# Solary Clary composer / musician

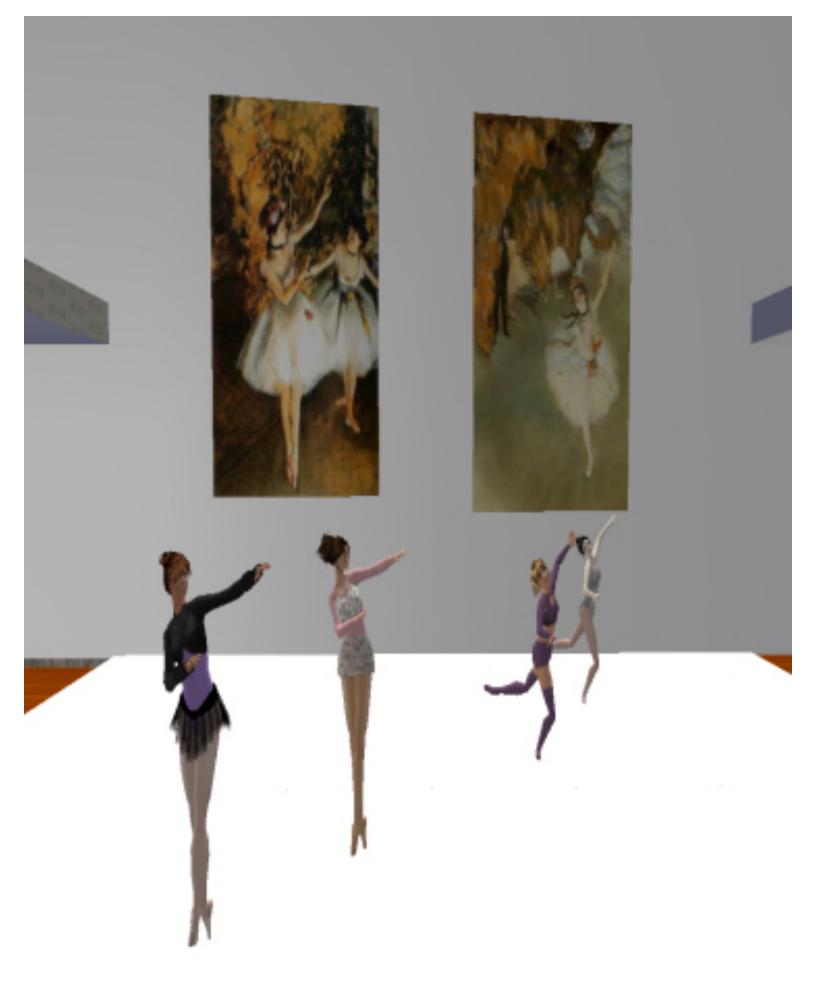
Ms. Clary was the composer for Shuzenji and for Living Goddess. She is a popular Japanese professional musician, singer, songwriter Sora Izumikawa. Ms. Clary has created music and lyrics for other professional singers, TV programs, commercials and manga songs in First Life. Ms. Clary performs live in Second Life and First Life, and her sweet voice provides cheer and happiness.



## Willis Rossini sound engineer

Mr. Rossini joined Ballet Pixelle in Spring, 2007 - playing sound for Pixelle Productions. He is also the chief sound engineer, editing and signal processing the music to fit the ballets, producing sound effects, and improving the quality of the sound as it plays through shoutcast.





#### The Making of a Ballet in Virtual Space

Inarra Saarinen, Artistic Director

Creating ballet in Second Life is truly an amazing experience -- one that stretches all of us in the Ballet Pixelle Company artistically, technically, and logistically. Dancing original works in the virtual world requires an extraordinary dedication and adherence to highest professional standards. It is not a task for the faint of heart, yet each performance lifts us all to the heights of artistic accomplishment. I had quickly realized the creative and dance possibilities from my first days in Second Life. Now after four years of hard work, a ton of perseverance, and some fabulously talented and committed people we have brought eight ballets to audiences in Second Life and three into First Life as well. Each ballet different from the others, yet they all begin in the same place.

The Goal

My goal from the beginning has been to explore and investigate physical and virtual dance and movement. This has never changed.

So far, we have held an invited presentation of "The Nut" at a New York City dance kinetics workshop where I was interviewed while in Tokyo. We were deemed "charming" by NYC dance critics. We danced our commissioned "Phylogeny" which was shown under a big screen while the Indiana Telematics Ensemble played live in Indiana. Recently, we presented and performed "Shuzenji" at the time - transcendence - performance conference hosted by Monash University in Australia.

The point is threefold, one to blend the realities of physical and virtual space, two to define a new a new aesthetic for virtual and virtual dance, and three, to create a new vocabulary of virtual / physical dance. This is well on its way.

Now that we have brought Ballet Pixelle into First Life, and Second Life to Second Life, we will be bringing First Life dance into Second Life.

#### How the Ballet Begins

Every ballet begins with an idea. Part of the beauty of writing the story specifically for Ballet Pixelle is that I am able to utilize the unique aspects of Second Life, the three-dimensional virtual world, to bring the story to life. For example, In "Olmanen" I saw dragon-like creatures appearing in the air, a couple in love spiraling down to earth, sprites flying, and a beautiful woman transforming instantly into an old woman while the man transformed into one of the evil beings. In "Windows" I saw silhouetted women dancing in the air, teenagers doing slow aerial flips, and a dream sequence where a man transforms to his younger self and the lovers rise up to the air together. In "Shuzenji" I saw how to dramatize the bonds of everlasting love as a hero murdered in a jealous rage enters the spirit world before our eyes and then returns to dance with his beloved. Once I've written the story and outlined the characters and their relationships, it is time to animate and choreograph. The story is expanded and refined over time as the dance continues to take shape in my head and in rehearsal.

#### Developing the Choreographic Animations

I began writing Ballet Pixelle movements with some different animation software programs and have created the majority of our animations over the course of the eight ballets. I have used Avimator, Qavimator, Poser and others as a starting point in this process. I now have approximately 450 original animations. When I am choreographing a ballet, I put these animations into gestures, similar to musical phrases in ballet. This way the choreographer and dancers and composer are able to work in a normal First Life style. These gestures also allow very precise timing between animations (in tenth of seconds but, alas, not counting lag) and compound animations. That is, in a gesture if you do not add a "wait" step the two animations happen at the same time. Each dancer can decide how to activate these gestures, for example by mapping the gestures to function keys or using chat "/gesture\_name" to activate the phrase. Ballet Pixelle dancers rehearse

and time the execution of each gesture in order, with the music, and with other dancers. I have tried working with both off-the-shelf and custom HUDs, but neither of them gave me all of the functionality that I needed. There were added lags in a HUD, for example, even though having buttons might have been convenient for the dancers.

It is important to recognize that there is a significant difference between Ballet Pixelle's animations and the typical dance animations avatars can use at clubs in Second Life. Club dances are simply loops of movement the avatar clicks onto and the animations play on their own. In Ballet Pixelle rehearsals and performances each dancer runs his or her own animation as though dancing on a real stage. And no poseballs!

#### How the Music is Played

Music is always composed specifically for Ballet Pixelle's ballets. Sometimes it is played from a recording, sometimes it is played live from London or the U.S. and streamed into our Second Life theatre. In "Shuzenji" the composer wrote lyrics afterwards and sang and played live to accompany some performances. And sometimes the orchestra is in First Life playing to a large-screen playing Ballet Pixelle dancing!

#### Rehearsal is Part of the Creative Process

Once the story begins to fall in place and the animations are written, I can begin to see my visions in the rehearsal process and refine what will work on stage. What a wonderful freedom to be able to choreograph with dancers who have grand jete's that are full splits in the air, perfect "turn-out", and timely forever turns! The virtual world also suggests movements impossible on a traditional stage. Here Nutcracker snow-flakes can float and swirl in mid-air without wires. This limitless movement lets me envision and then produce stunning effects other choreographers can only dream of. Rehearsals take place in almost exactly the

same way a First Life rehearsal does -- except for the "I need you to hover up a bit" kind of directions. Of course, these are real dancers, so there are always the "I thought said you wanted me to come downstage?" kind of discussions. The dancers are not scripted!

#### Costumes and Sets Play a Role in Ballet Pixelle

For Ballet Pixelle a "costume" is more than a tutu and a wig, it can be the entire look of a character including body shape, size, and skin texture. For some characters we have designed and built our own specialized avatars, for others we have sought resources outside the Company. Second Life is a user-built community filled with creative people. Ballet Pixelle spends a significant amount of time working with designers of clothing and of avatar body and skin types to find the pieces that work to fulfill the ballet's artistic vision. We negotiate with each designer to make the costumes "transfer ok". In this way, costumes can go out to the dancers and then are transferred back into Ballet Pixelle's wardrobe department. Designers who contribute costumes are acknowledged in the playbill.

Ballet Pixelle sets have character as well. We have a number of extremely creative builders and object animators within our Company. I describe my vision for the look and even action of the set pieces and after a lot of hard work and very long hours they deliver pieces that enhance the overall impact of the ballet.

#### We Quickly Outgrew Our First Theatre

Our home theatre in Quat is where we first debuted. The theatre originally held 20, then 30, then 40 avatars, and then we could no longer hold our audience. So we investigated and researched plans for a more efficient, reduced lag, larger theatre. Eventually, we built a similar theatre to our home theatre hosted by IBM in the IBM sims. This theatre stretches across two sims -- the audience of 80 is in one and the stage and dancers are in another. Besides reducing lag, and allowing for a larger audience, Security is enabled by simply putting different access restrictions on the stage sim.

#### Real People in a Virtual Ballet

At every step in the process from first thoughts through performance I am working with wonderful collaborators literally all around the world. We are able to meet in a space in Second Life and work together live, as though we were really in the same geographical time and place. This intercontinental collaboration would be impossible First Life. Composers for our ballets live in London, the United States, and Japan. Our theater architects are in Australia and Japan, and our dancers and crew are from Austria, Denmark, East Coast of the U.S., England, Hawai'i, mid-West U.S., Netherlands, Portugal, and the West Coast of the U.S. The entire cast and crew are volunteers who are interested in pursuing artistic movement and dance in the virtual world that is Second Life. Each person from the emcee to the lighting and sound technicians and stage manager, put in long hours to assure the performances go as smoothly as possible within the complexity and variability of the Second Life platform. The dancers are also cross-trained in some crew positions. Understanding this commitment is a part of the audition process. Ballet Pixelle dancers are extraordinarily dedicated and are a large part of why the ballet works.

#### What Next?

From what we have learned over four years, we are now moving to our long-awaited next step. In "Degas" we have Second Life dancers dancing with a machinima, or video, of another Second Life dancer. So there is a new element of time and we can bring Second Life to Second Life and explore what that means. The next step is to bring in First Life dancers into Second Life.

#### In Closing

In closing, this is an exhilarating experience with an absolutely wonderful committed artistic team. We are learning an amazing amount about the limitations and possibilities of virtual and physical dance and how they interconnect. We look forward to more exploration in the future. Remember, if you have the chance to sit it out or dance, dance.

Join us in dancing into the digital future!

#### Thank you to ...

Edgar Degas, for his inspirational inside look at the Paris Opera Ballet and movement in the late 1800s.

Amelie Dibou for her original costumes for all three Acts, the sculpture of "The Little Dancer" in Act II, and the set build.

Trasgo Beaumont & Mau Delarosa for the custom Master's costume in Act I.

Women's ballet costumes from Terpsichore's Delight.

IBM for hosting us in our theatre in IBM 9 & 10

and you, our audience, for supporting us and joining us in creating the magic of dance.

