

## The only time he sits down is to dance

PAULA CITRON

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To say that Josh Beamish is a whiz kid is an understatement. He has his own highly regarded Vancouver dance company, is artist-in-residence at Burnaby, B.C.'s Shadbolt Centre, and this season has three shows touring various parts of the country.

Did I mention he's 21?

Beamish's Move: The Company kicks off its *Trap Door Party* six-city Canadian tour at Toronto's Winchester Street Theatre tomorrow (with a later side trip to New York's prestigious Joyce SoHo Theatre). Coming in the new year are *Zero* (Montreal and Quebec City) and *The Electronic Series* (six cities in B.C.). And then there's the premiere of Beamish's new work, *The Cell*, in March, as part of the Vancouver International Dance Festival. He also just set his first commission on Ballet Kelowna, an *en-pointe* work called *The Red Nocturnal*.

What makes Josh run? His answer is simple: "I'm a complete overachiever."



Josh Beamish



Beamish grew up in Kelowna, where his life was consumed with dance. His mother was a ballet teacher; Beamish started training when he was 2. It quickly became clear that the youngster had prodigious talent. Whether for ballet, jazz, tap, modern or hip hop, each year at the B.C. Annual Dance Competition in Prince Rupert, Beamish won awards and prize money in every dance style and every category.

Ever the entrepreneur, Beamish founded Move: The Young Company when he was 15. He created all the choreography, and mounted three successful productions at the local Creekside Theatre. In his senior high-school year, he choreographed a fashion show to raise money for his class's prom.

Because his focus was entirely on dance, Beamish had few of the usual teenage distractions, and was able to graduate at 16, a year and a half early. He aced his courses, and was awarded a scholarship to York University's film program in Toronto – but turned it down, even though he had produced a few of his own short films in high school. “I will get back to film one day,” he says. “I want to be a director.”

What put film firmly on hold, Beamish explains, was that extra 18 months he bought himself by graduating early. “I wanted to get out of Kelowna,” he says. “I never felt right there. I didn't party, and I hated skating. My peers didn't know what they were going to do with their lives, while I had big aspirations.”

Beamish moved to Vancouver to take advance training in ballet at Pacific DanceArts, and in jazz and hip hop with the semi-professional Source Dance Company based at the Harbour Dance Centre. He never looked back.

“My grandmother had invested in a university fund for me,” he says, “and she paid my tuition and rent [in Vancouver]. I was responsible for my food and expenses. The understanding was that if I ever did go to university, I'd have to work my way through.”

To make extra money, Beamish auditioned for jobs. In the first month, he landed a spot in the short-lived American sitcom *Life As We Know It* with Kelly Osborne, Ozzy's daughter. He later worked on four big-ticket films as a dancer, dance captain or assistant choreographer: *The Wicker Man*, *Totally Awesome*, *The Cleaner* and *Spectacular*.

Beamish had begun teaching for his mother at 12, and had developed a top-notch pedagogical reputation. Through contacts he had met in Prince Rupert, he gave workshops – not just in Vancouver, but all over B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan.

It was on a return trip from out of province in 2005 that he totalled his car on a telephone pole, when he hit black ice near Vernon. The accident changed the course of his life. At first, he didn't think he was injured, but soon discovered he had serious alignment issues.

During his recovery, although he could still perform contemporary dance, Beamish had to give up ballet classes. Never one to spend time on his hands, he began to seriously explore choreography. Five months later, he put on his first show, *Close Enough*, based on Patrick Marber's play *Closer*, which dealt with the cruelty of lovers. "I had always thought I'd be a professional dancer," he says, "but now I knew I wanted to create dances."

At 18, the year after his accident, Beamish founded Move: The Company. His first choreographic efforts were based on ballet technique overlaid with jazz, hip hop and contemporary accents – Beamish calls it "urban fusion." In short order, he was presented by Vancouver's Dances for a Small Stage and the Earth Link Festival.

In Move's second season, Beamish created two full-length works. *Zero*, based on Bret Easton Ellis's novel, *Less Than Zero*, was about overprivileged youth. *The Electronic Series* was set to four different pieces of electronic music, performed in four different styles. These led to his company's appearance at Vancouver's Dancing on the Edge Festival.

With each successive piece, Beamish has found himself edging away from Broadway and music-video-influenced dance commercialism to becoming a more postmodern, genuinely contemporary choreographer. *Trap Door Party* is a new venture for him because it is not based on specific source material. Set to a score of classical music and orchestral covers of songs by electronic artist Aphex Twin, performed by the chamber orchestra Alarm Will Sound, the piece for six dancers presents a bleak take on themes of utopia and dystopia. Says Beamish, displaying no lack of self-confidence: "It's the work I'm most proud of, because it shows maturity and depth in structure, movement, character and storytelling."

Heather Dotto, 22, has known Beamish since both were barely teenagers. Dance veteran Alison Denham, 29, was a member of Toronto's Dancemakers before moving back to Vancouver. Both appear in *Trap Door Party* – and both are Beamish groupies. They love the speed and intricate precision of his movement, and his eclecticism. "Josh is just a flood of ideas," says Denham, "and he wants to try them all by pulling what he can out of the dancers."

Dotto believes Beamish was unhappy with the Vancouver dance scene and wanted to make something new: a style that embraced many kinds of dance, but was expressed through a strong personal voice. "He could be the busiest professional dancer in town," she says, "but he's a director at heart. He needed a company. Being part of Move, I've had more challenges than I've had my entire life in dance. Everyone wants to work with him."

When he is not choreographing, Beamish is teaching like a madman to pay his dancers. He says he also loves writing grant applications: It focuses his projects more clearly in his mind. "My favourite subject in high school was persuasive writing," he notes. He is also a one-man band for his company, doing all the administration, and organizing the tours.

Beamish would like to live part-time in Montreal, where he is inspired by the dance scene, and where his lover, a French-Canadian dentist, lives. He also travels to see dance whenever and wherever he can.

His ultimate goal? “I want Move to become Vancouver's full-time contemporary dance company,” he declares, “with a national and international reputation, and dancers on contract year-round. Currently, the city doesn't have one. I can make this happen, because I'm not afraid of any challenge that comes my way.”

*MOVE: The Company performs Trap Door Party in Toronto (Oct. 26-28), Edmonton (Dec. 14), Calgary (Dec. 15), New York (Dec. 18-20) and in March in the British Columbia towns of Courtenay, Nelson and Vernon.*