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***When the tingle  
becomes a chill:***

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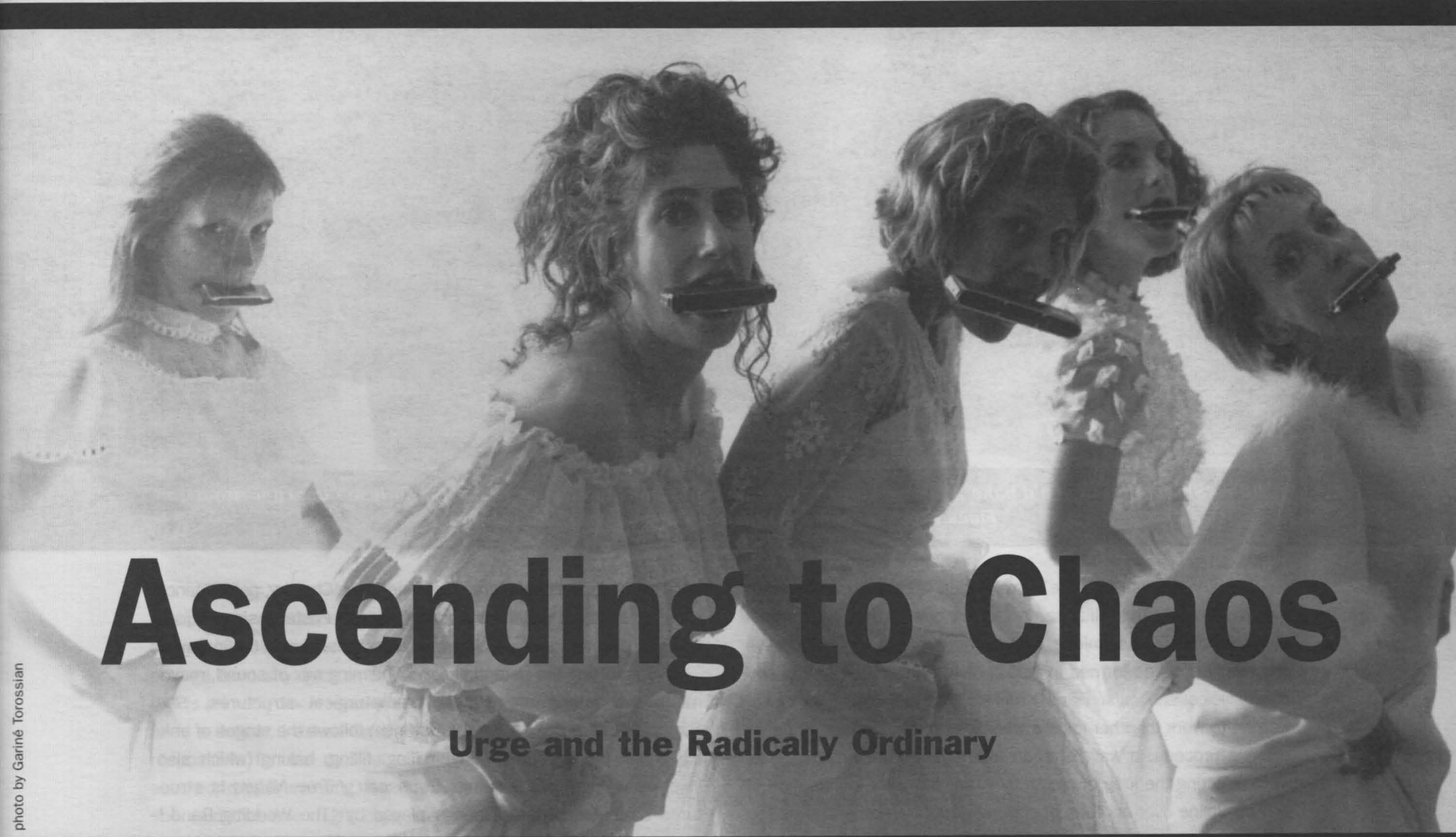


photo by Gariné Torossian

# Ascending to Chaos

**Urge and the Radically Ordinary**

## *Trousseau / True Nature*

*Left to right: Linda Catlin Smith, Fides Krucker, Katherine Duncanson, Gabrielle Epstein, Marie-Josée Chartier*

by **Maria Gould**

**T**rousseau / True Nature, the latest production of Toronto's Urge Music Theatre Collective, begins with a quartet of female musicians making their entrance on stage and tuning up. What is it that's wrong with this picture, though? Well, the musicians seem to be wearing bridal outfits—complete with veils—which interfere with the solid planting of legs and broad arm movements required to play instruments. It's comical, but unsettling at the same time. The bride, that sacred icon of beauty, is, it seems, all too easily rendered ridiculous by a functional posture.

Our host for the night is Katherine Duncanson, decked out as a '50s bride, who dedicates a song, "When the Tingle Becomes a Chill," to the happy couple. It's a comforting enough beginning, reminiscent of the not-so-funny jokes we've all heard at wedding receptions. We chuckle knowingly at the inevitable waning of the couple's passion ... but wait! This show is not going to remain behind a safe, ironic fourth wall. The performers are advancing *en*

*masse* into the audience, seeking dance partners and—gender stereotypes be damned—are approaching women, too.

Duncanson's voice bursts the bonds of single-note purity at strategic moments in her solo. The word "body" scrapes, then blurs, before rejoining the orderly line of notes, and "chill" takes on a haunted, windy quality, occasionally dividing into multiphonics. The lights go down and the women gather at the back of the stage, chanting text which signals a journey into the world of dreams.

As in any Urge performance, the mundane and often unexamined activities of our day-to-day lives come under scrutiny. Like Duncanson's notes, familiar moments are frayed and all their hidden elements explored before they are brought back into recognizable shape again. The women may become extravagant, brutal, predatory, anguished, feral, raunchy, greedy, or just plain loud ... all the qualities that women especially—though not exclusively—are conditioned to deny.



from "She promised she'd bake a pie..." Left to right: Eve Egoyan, Linda Catlin Smith, Marie-Josée Chartier (front), Fides Krucker (back), Katherine Duncanson, Anita LaSelva

The primary medium for Urge's exploration is sound, closely allied with movement. This alliance, in fact, is one of the group's hallmarks, owing to the unique, collaborative nature of its creative process. Urge was formed in 1992, at the instigation of contemporary voice specialist Fides Krucker. She gathered a group of women to work together for two weeks, with the intention of developing a process, a way to create something from nothing. They were rejecting the idea of hierarchy in any form: the domination of one discipline over another, of one individual over others, even the privileging of a predetermined script over moment-to-moment improvisation.

In a group interview, I asked a few of the original members about those first weeks, and the appeal which the idea had for each of them. I was greeted with a bubbling up of memories—vivid, chaotic fragments, indicating that the whole process had evolved (and was continuing to evolve) without a fixed agenda. I learned that the first group had a number of rituals every day: clearing the rehearsal space with burning sage, a "check-in" to explore issues that were current for each woman, sharing dreams, images, objects, and text. Text was written by one woman and read aloud by another. From this residency there emerged a short performance, and a commitment to continue the exploration. The women kept in touch, with letters and objects being mailed in a round-robin fashion rather than back and forth between pairs. These letters became the textual basis for their first show, *I Had an Urge to Write You* (1993)—not the origin of the group's name, which derives from a Georgia O'Keefe painting, *The Everlasting Urge*.

Urge went on to create *Abstract Chains*, 1995 and *She Promised She'd Bake a Pie*, 1997, and most recently, *Trousseau / True Nature* in spring 2000. The personnel over the years has included Eve Egoyan, Lori Freedman, Beverley Johnston, and Lisa Karrer, among others, and participants such as Anita La Selva come and go depending on other commitments. The present Urge

consists of dancer-choreographer Marie-Josée Chartier, performance artist Katherine Duncanson, actor Gabrielle Epstein, singer Fides Krucker, director Joanna McIntyre, and composer Linda Catlin Smith.

Supporting the potentially overwhelming mix of sound, movement and image are simple dramaturgical structures. *She Promised She'd Bake a Pie*, for instance, follows the stages of baking a pie: preparation, mixing, rolling, filling, baking (which also involves waiting) and serving. *Trousseau / True Nature* is structured around a series of songs played by "The Wedding Band." Each one is an exploration of some aspect of love: illusion and loss thereof, betrayal, desire, and commitment. The familiar rituals, objects, and phrases associated with weddings are toyed with in associative, dream-like fashion, using text, images, and sound.

Each member is expert in at least one discipline, and is willing to share it with the others. Women lead warm-ups in their own disciplines. McIntyre, in turn, watches these warm-ups and collaborates with the women in developing scenes from them. "In the training or the warm-up," says Krucker, "you have to start looking at things from a different point of view. You're teaching your thing in a way that has room for input from the other areas." Smith adds, "When you're working physically or vocally you have these little antennae that are also noticing, paying attention to things that might happen, that you might want to go back and use ... You're already in creation even when you're just warming up." This is very much in evidence in *Trousseau*, which, as McIntyre points out, is especially rich in ensemble work. In one section, the women toss a bridal bouquet back and forth in a manner that echoes the ballplay that is so much a feature of Krucker's voice classes. At a later point in the show, Krucker sings Billie Holiday's "Tell Me More," with a level of longing and pain that most of us would prefer to deny we are capable of. It is not difficult to imagine that the group rolling that culminates in this solo also began life as a breathing and movement exercise.



from "I Had an Urge to Write You"

front Lisa Karrer, middle Marie-Josée Chartier, back Linda Catlin Smith

Although each woman may lead a warm-up in a discipline in which she is most secure, all stress that compositional, dance, and dramaturgical ideas may emerge from any quarter, and a woman whose expertise is primarily vocal is as apt to choreograph a scene as is a dancer. I asked Smith if she, for instance, felt responsible for the musical aspects of a show if it seemed to be foundering. Her answer was no, although she said that she might have an especially profound appreciation of what is going on, on account of her training as a composer.

Smith spoke about what this crossing of disciplines has given her. "I like doing things that I'm not supposed to be good at. Movement was not my expertise. The expectation to have to be good wasn't there. This was new for me, so I had the permission to just go for it." For Chartier, the need to communicate her own discipline has deepened her understanding of it, and has challenged her to create new communication tools. "How could [a person] learn harmony, singing, without necessarily knowing all the theory?" She hinted at a set of first principles underlying all the arts, which the Urge women have somehow found a way to tap into. "You discover things that you can do that would be the same for voice or flamenco." Smith added: "Composition is transferable. The way something unfolds, is made, is transferable."

Joanna McIntyre, the group's facilitating director, was fascinated with the possibilities of collective creation. "I was thinking that there was a different way of directing. A co-creative way. [In television,] the director had too much power. There was something going on with directors which wasn't where I was headed. In television, whatever you say happens, it gets done, even if it's wrong." She wondered, for a while, how she could make a contribution,



## *Trousseau / True Nature* a nocturnal bridal walk into the landscape of female psyche

Left to right: Fides Krucker, Gabrielle Epstein, Katherine Duncanson and (in background) Linda Catlin Smith

### Works by Urge

#### *I Had an Urge to Write You* (1993)

Developed out of correspondence between the members of Urge, and presented in Toronto at the Helen Gardiner Phelan Theatre. Co-produced by Autumn Leaf Performance, it toured to the Vancouver New Music Festival in the fall of the same year.

#### *Abstract Chains* (1995)

A series of musical explorations built out of collective improvisation and experimentation, presented in two shows at the Music Gallery, as part of Autumn Leaf Performance's Sonic Boom series.

#### *She Promised She'd Bake a Pie* (1996)

Self-described as a "music-driven performance fantasy," this show follows the four stages of baking a pie: preparation, mixing, rolling, filling, baking, and serving. A co-production with Autumn Leaf, it was premiered at the du Maurier Theatre Centre, Harbourfront (Toronto).

#### *Silo* (1997)

A five-minute film by Laura Taler, taking place entirely inside a silo on a farm.

#### *Trousseau / True Nature* (2000)

An exploration of marriage in sound, image, and text. Members of "The Wedding Band" share their favourite songs and turn all the familiar rituals on their ear. Produced in Calgary in conjunction with One Yellow Rabbit High Performance Rodeo, and in Toronto with the du Maurier Theatre Centre.

given that she came out of such a text-and-character-driven tradition. "I had always thought I couldn't hear. I was good at visuals, movement, drama. Sound was not my forte, it was a weakness ... I thought: my God, what am I doing here?" Still, she has become a vital participant and, she says, has learned, as a director, to interfere less. She now arrives several hours into the working day, when warm-ups are well in session, thus allowing performers to take more ownership of the process. This practice has, in turn, spilled over into other directing contexts.

Krucker stresses, however, that Urge's creative cross-pollination is only possible because its members are utterly secure in

their own disciplines, and thus perhaps implies that first principles are only accessible to those who have a profound level of understanding in their separate art forms. "Each of us is really good in our own discipline. Over the years we can also let go of our own disciplines. We've had people who can't let go of their own discipline. That holds things back. You have to be really good at what you do, because then you can go out into these other areas. You can transform or transfer into other areas. I'm never going to look like a dancer when I'm on stage with Urge, but I can be involved with those aspects of movement, and of taking movement into a different place, which are not constrained by a formal history or something like it. And the same thing is true of singing. We can all sing on stage but we don't have to sound like opera singers. But we have a group sound that has evolved, and we have an expertise in how to sing together. It comes out of being very good at what you do and being absolutely willing to share it in a good way."

Interestingly enough, Smith defined "expertise" as simply a willingness to take risks. "The level of willingness to risk would be less, the less experience you've had. It doesn't preclude anything; it has to do with the desire and the willingness to go forward with a group." A certain shared skill-base, however, cannot be ignored. All the women have performing experience, all have a strong grounding in music, an ability to count—and, as Chartier said in an interview on the television program *Adrienne Clarkson Presents* (1998), "One thing we have in common is the voice."

Since the initial workshop in 1992, the Urge process has continued to evolve. The disciplines have blended increasingly into one another, even in the warm-up stage. *Trousseau*, according to Chartier, presented special challenges in terms of the transitions between scenes. In response to this challenge, the group decided to focus on the transitions between stages of their warm-ups, so that the moment of moving from, say, a vocal to a movement warm-up would be felt among all members, and acted upon without being discussed. "We could spend a couple of hours not even saying what we were going to do next, and we could just move through it," Chartier said.

As well, the group's method of working has become gentler and more tolerant than any of its members have been used to. They spoke of the relief they felt when they let themselves work at a low energy level if they were all tired, or even let themselves miss a rehearsal if they were feeling ill.

The interrelationship of voice and body has always been an important aspect of Krucker's singing, as she pointed out. The cross-disciplinary explorations of Urge seem to have taken this connection to new levels. In her rendition of Billie Holiday's "Tell Me More," I was especially impressed with this seamless blending. The piece begins with all the women lying side by side on the floor, rolling back and forth, sometimes on top of each other in what the program notes call a "bridal river bed." As they roll, their deep breaths become increasingly voiced, in a way that is not so much synchronized with the movement as arising from it. As Krucker emerges from the group and stands up to sing, she is supported by the constantly moving backs, legs, and arms of the other women. The process of going from a lying to a free-standing position does not take place abruptly, or even in a directed, linear fashion, as we are used to seeing when adults stand up. Rather, it takes place in

wave-like movements, with returns to lower, more supported postures. The result conjures up images of a plant erecting itself from a seed, or even the stages a baby goes through in order to learn to stand. In a parallel process, the voiced breaths come very gradually to resemble what we might recognize as musical, and Krucker's voice distinguishes itself from the others only by degrees, rejoining the group at times before she makes another sound on her own. The result is, in one sense, comforting and pleasurable to witness. It seems familiar, perhaps because it draws its form from so many organic processes. The notes, deeply grounded in Krucker's body, are full and rich, and the unhurried evolution of both sound and movement produces a kind of security. This sense of security and identification, however, also makes the viewer vulnerable to the raw pain, anger, and desire in Krucker's voice. When I watched the show live, I had the sensation that tears were being pulled from my eyes by the notes.



photo by Gariné Torossian

The group spoke to me of the emotional aspect of their work together. Through voice, movement, or the sharing of dreams, they have all come to touch upon difficult emotions and taboo subjects. Indeed, their ensemble work would not go far without a willingness to venture into their personal and shared darkness. This gives rise not only to a sense of trust within the group, but to an ability to challenge audiences. Like all aspects of the group's process, however, Urge's method (if it may be called that) of emotional processing has evolved over the years. According to Krucker, "[there used to be a] difficulty with ... something coming up in one's own life where it would put a stop to things. [Now,] without capping it, we find a way to take it into the work." Smith added, "We can be weeping and still working. I couldn't do that years ago ... If an emotional thing comes up through dealing with voice work, we don't caretake each other. We let someone have their emotion. It tells us all something. It's useful."

All are quick to point out, however, that theirs is not a therapeutic context. According to McIntyre: "Something can look therapeutic [but it's just] extending a boundary. We're saying that the personal life and what is going on in it *does* play a part in the work, it's not separate from it. It comes with the work but it doesn't indulge itself in place of the work. We've all learned

where that line is. One sometimes steps over the line but usually we're pretty good. A lot of the times there appears to be a separation. But it's part of our mandate to bring it all in." Krucker added that psychotherapy and art are two different ways of processing the same raw material. She also pointed out that a healthy measure of humour is always present in an Urge show, even though it may be added at the last moment.

Urge forces us to examine all our assumptions around music: its fundamental boundaries, as well as all the aesthetic judgements we might make within them. This is very clearly a music theatre group, with an emphasis on the "music." The solid musical background of the performers and the skill with which the recognizable musical "numbers" are executed create a context of musicality, of musical awareness. Into this context, the group brings an irrever-



ence which challenges us to hear any and all sounds as musical. In "Tell Me More," for instance, all vocalization has the potential of falling into the category of music. The women's sighs produce a myriad of rhythmic and tonal effects. As these edge back and forth into recognizable "singing," we cannot help but let go of any definition of music which excludes these sounds. In her solo, Krucker alternates between what we recognize as "notes," and roaring or bellowing sounds. These are produced on the appropriate pitch, and they are also charged with emotional life. Thus, we have to search for new answers to the questions: What is beautiful? What is good singing? What is a pure note?

Assumptions about ensemble singing and composition are challenged as well. In a segment called "Here Come the Brides," all the women work their way towards the audience in the exaggerated throes of orgasm. In a later scene, they move about a darkened stage producing shrieks like birds. In a mysterious scene in *She Promised She'd Bake a Pie*, the women prowl about on all fours, emitting deep, breathy, predatory tones. These sounds are all made in the women's own time, according to their personal cycles of breath and movement, rather than according to any predetermined score, and the combinations their voices produce are endlessly variable. Thus, they break down our precon-

ceptions about what is harmony, and what constitutes "singing together." The random combinations are every bit as musical as the organized or intentional combinations. Single authorship is no more valid than group authorship and, by extension, no more valid than whatever forces in our natural or man-made environments might bring sounds together in a particular way and at a particular time. The show thus opens a way for us to go out of the theatre hearing the world around us differently.

In all the ensemble scenes I have just mentioned, the stage is filled with a huge, all-encompassing sound. It is much bigger than one might expect five or six women to be able to produce. Their voices work together synergistically, all the while calling forth tremendous archetypal and emotional power. This hugeness could be considered a characteristic of the Urge sound that Krucker refers to. So, too, could a kind of egalitarian approach to sound. For Urge, "musical" sounds are not privileged over the sounds a body makes during ordinary, healthy functioning, nor are human sounds privileged over those of non-human animals. There are moments of clearly arranged harmony, which offer their own kind of musical experience, but these are challenged in their status by fortuitous vocal and instrumental combinations.

By the same token, the special status of musical instruments is undermined. All props and costumes have the potential of becoming instruments (including the cooking implements in *Pie* and even the backdrop in *Trousseau*). So-called "instruments," on the other hand, are treated as ordinary objects, and as such, are used in improvisational play. A violin bow is transformed into a riding crop, a harmonica into a riding bit. In an astounding scene from *Pie*, Eve Egoyan plays a piano using her thighs and buttocks. We are challenged, both by the context and by the gracefulness of her movements, to hear what she plays as musical, despite the seeming randomness or dissonance of the sounds. This sequence visually and sonically deconstructs a hierarchy that is forced upon most of us at an early age. The hands are the smallest and weakest parts of the body, with the most rarified capacity for both sensation and movement, yet they rival the head in their exaggerated importance in post-industrial society. In this scene, Egoyan makes music with parts of her body that are used for locomotion, for elimination, for sex, thus literally up-ending the precedence of hands over "inferior" parts.

Spoken text can also take on a musical quality in Urge productions. A great deal of the group's text is generated through the recording of dreams. This choice points to an attempt to reach beneath functional speech or linear thought, into the world of image and symbol. In *Trousseau*, the regular chanting in a "round" formation of a fragment of dream-text takes this spoken text into the realm of the musical. In some songs, a line or two will be spoken (such as in Krucker's aria as the Fruit Goddess in *She Promised She'd Bake a Pie*). In Chartier's dough-rolling scene in the same show, a recipe for pie is read out loud both by Chartier and members of the audience, and she, with endearing literal-mindedness, renders the text in mime. In this scene, she allows a singsong quality to creep into her voice as she responds to each instruction with a broad: "Oooh-KAY!" Generally, however, I think this is an area where the group could develop more. I would be interested to see more of the exploration of the rhythms and tonality, of which Urge is so manifestly capable, focused on so-called "normal" or everyday speech.



The properties, sets, and costumes play a particular role in Urge shows. They are alive. They speak, not only figuratively in the playful ways they are handled on stage, but literally, in the puns and symbolism that they embody. In a sequence in *Trousseau*, the “lucky” Linda Smith catches the bridal bouquet and is prepared for her wedding by the other women. A brilliant series of transformations takes place not only in the women’s movements and sounds but also in the props and costumes. The bride becomes a horse, her veil, a mane. The rituals of dressing her are tinged with an increasingly menacing quality of control as she is treated less and less like a human and more and more like a show animal. A “bit,” which proves to be a harmonica, is placed in her mouth. As Smith canters around the stage, her breath through the harmonica makes a sound resembling the whinnying of a horse, but with an eerie quality that seemed to me to be plaintive. Later, all the women take up harmonicas and simulate church bell sounds with them as they sweep their upper bodies down to the ground and up again in a bowing motion. Finally, the “horses” lie down to sleep and Duncanson puts on a cowboy hat and plays a lullaby to them on her harmonica. The transitions in this sequence are not forced, but emerge naturally, out of moments of seeming confusion. This section is called “Grooming the Bride, or Down the Bridle Path.”

Spatial relationships are played with in dream-like fashion in all the shows. Chartier’s pie dough, for instance, is so enormous that she rolls herself in it rather than rolling it out with a rolling pin. This reflects the nervousness of the first-time baker, but it also echoes the spatial distortion that can occur in dreams. Dream-like, too, is the juxtaposition of elements which are logically disparate, but which have associative or intuitive connections. During a later scene in *Pie*, the women, dressed in aprons and G-strings, roll from one side to the other on the floor with concertinas between their bent knees, making vocal sounds resembling those of cattle or sheep. The image is complex and layered, and not easily categorized. My own association was with milk-fed veal, but others might have seen something quite different. The women’s pale buttocks with their trussed-up appearance, in combination with the aprons, in combination with the docile, animal sounds, all of this overlaid with the farcical whining of the concertinas, makes for an image that is not easily categorized but that lingers uncomfortably in memory like an image from a dream.

Punning, symbolism, juxtaposition, the multi-functionality of objects and the distortion of spatial relationships all emerge out of a pre-verbal level of consciousness, a level where categorical limitations do not exist. It is not surprising that a group which creates its work through pre-linguistic movement-and-sound exploration should be able to tap into this level for their properties, costumes, and sets. The co-creative nature of Urge’s work serves the group particularly well in this area, I think, as such freshness and vitality would be impossible if the visual aspects of the production were merely filled in, based on a predetermined script. Natalie Rewa writes of the sets and costumes for *Pie*:

Their sense of design comes from the improvisation with sound that the women have conducted over a period of time ... Their own bodies became the infrastructure of the visual design; a long length of fabric served as the dough, while the steel mixing bowls, wire whisks and heels of their shoes were the only instruments other than a piano, which accompanied the singing (Rewa 1998, 15).

The women said that they try to bring their designers in as early as possible. Vikki Anderson has been props and set designer for both *Pie* and *Trousseau*. Julia Tribe designed costumes for *Pie*, and Tracey Glas designed them for *Trousseau*. The props and set designer for *Urge* was Teresa Przybylski. The lighting designer for *Urge* and *Pie* was Bonnie Beecher, and the lighting designer for *Trousseau* was Paul Mathiesen.

When I attended a tech dress rehearsal of *Trousseau*, I was interested—and amused—to notice the degree of confusion that was taking place all around. The show was clearly still in process, with segments being cut and added even as the technical parameters were being set. Both the tidy professionalism of a tech rehearsal, and the bored detachment that one would normally see in performers were absent here. I asked the women how on earth they manage the practical aspects of putting a show together. They answered that they had been blessed with remarkable stage managers and technical collaborators. And they do fall back, if necessary, on a less consultative way of working in the midst of a tour or just before a performance, if the need arises. Their commitment to improvisation, however, goes very deep. “We try to be in the moment. We invite that. It has to be. In performance there’s always a lot of improvisation. There are posts, but within that there is improvisation. Things are always slightly changing,” Smith said. This is what makes for the dangerous / comic edge that may emerge at any moment in performance. For instance, the penultimate scene of *Trousseau* evolved in the course of the show’s debut performance in Calgary, and the present ending of the show was added just before the first Toronto performance.

Urge’s process has been shaped by the disciplines of all the women who have worked in the group since its inception. These include such diverse influences as yoga (with Gabrielle Epstein), flamenco (with Anita La Selva), and the left / right brain integration work brought in by Katherine Duncanson. Visitors have regularly been invited to give workshops. Sue Morrison has worked with the group on clown, Banuta Rubess on theatrical improvisation. Workshops in singing with Michele George, Maryam Hassan, and Alejandra Nunes have helped the group create its distinct vocal sound. The Urge members have also worked, together and separately, with vocal teacher Richard Armstrong, whose approach to the voice was a formative influence for Krucker. Although it has taken its own direction, Urge follows, in certain respects, in the tradition of Armstrong and his predecessors, Roy Hart and Alfred Wolfsohn. According to Krucker, “There’s an aspect to the way [Armstrong] works with the voice that has influenced me and what I have brought into the group, but also an aspect of how we work with one another. It’s something about going into the dark places. This is not unique to his work, but there is a tangible way of using the voice to go into those places. For me it broke down the need to hold onto the old classical way of singing. That would have been so limiting in a group like this. We have capitalized on what’s extraordinary about each person’s voice and how we can create new vocal places as a group. We find these places, or an individual finds them, or we teach them to one another.”

Integration of voice with body, and emotional honesty in voice are the keynotes of Urge’s work, as they are with Richard Armstrong. Furthermore, Armstrong, like Hart before him and Wolfsohn before *him*, strove to redeem the Bacchanalian or



chaotic elements of the human spirit. The work that put Hart's theatre group on the map was, in fact, *The Bacchae* in 1969 (Pikes 1999, 83). The mythical worshippers of Bacchus were women, breaking out of the strictures of their roles if only for a short time, so it makes sense that a group of women performers would engage that Bacchanalian energy on stage.

Like the women of *Urge*, Hart and his students ventured into the hidden or taboo aspects of the psyche, expressing any and all emotions and singing in both the traditionally masculine as well as the feminine vocal ranges. Sounds often considered ugly or not valid in an operatic context—breathy, broken sounds, “dirty” or “impure” sounds—were included by Hart in the musical vocabulary, as they have been by *Urge*. Also included were animal and bird sounds, multiphonics and overtones (Armstrong 1996, 40). “The voice,” Krucker comments, “is still pretty stuck—maybe more so than dance—in a compositional way. If you look at the progress in dance as opposed to the progress in contemporary opera ... they're just not the same. The whole vocabulary of movement has changed in dance but the vocabulary of singing has not changed.”

Another feature of Hart's work was the close linking of the rehearsal and teaching process with an examination of issues that were current for the performers. As in *Urge*, dreams were often a vehicle for this examination, and also as in *Urge*, the whole process was ultimately directed towards performance, rather than towards psychotherapy. A great intimacy and lifelong relationships were established between members of Hart's theatre troupe. Eventually, they all lived together and shared resources. The women of *Urge* are also deeply involved with each other, not only in, but outside of, the rehearsal process. Indeed, in a preface to a chapbook on Richard Armstrong, Krucker describes the attendance of group members at the birth of her second child (Armstrong 1996, 4–5).

Despite these similarities, I would not say that *Urge* is following the Roy Hart theatre in an imitative fashion. Rather, the group's commitment to vocal and physical exploration seems to have led its members to a similar place. They have insisted on changing the paradigms of theatrical expression, as well as of life and relationships. This is not surprising when one thinks about it more carefully. This is not the kind of work that can be left behind in the rehearsal hall, or indeed confined to the intense but short-lived connections that might occur around the preparation of most shows. Such profound internal exploration could not go on without a demand for changes in the outer life.

Without downplaying its interdisciplinary expertise, I feel that *Urge*'s most striking feature is its grounding in the ordinary, at the same time as it explores the most arcane reaches of the female—and, indeed, the human—spirit. Take the penultimate scene of *Trouseau / True Nature*, which was added so late in the show's development. Gabrielle Epstein, the group's newest member, plays a supporting role for most of the show, and we come to expect she'll not be featured in her own solo. Then, at the last moment, she is called upon to give “a word from the bride.” A sweet, girlish Epstein undertakes to thank her parents for all they've done for her, but her speech descends (or would it be better to say “ascends”?) into chaos before our eyes. Epstein is a frightening performer in the best sense: we have no idea what she's about to do, and we have a sneaking feeling that she is capable of anything. The laughter in the audience is, as in all great comedy, tinged with discomfort.

First, she is interrupted by increasingly aggressive drumbeats and the clinking of glasses, enjoining her to go out and grab audience members to kiss. When she finally gets around to the speech, her vocal and facial expressions break out of “blushing bride” mode, seemingly against her will. Thanking her mother for her cooking, she becomes, by turns, bovine and operatic as she rhapsodizes about food. Addressing her father, she plays the role of both bull and matador, one ceremonious hand holding up an edge of her skirt as a cape, behind which she twitches her face, snorts and paws the ground. As she declares her love for her father, her voice deepens into sultriness, and from there into the gruffness of an adolescent boy. Finally, she chooses a male member of the audience as the groom, fawning on the poor guy as she rhapsodizes about him in extemporaneous couplets.

The scene retains an edge of normalcy, but Epstein's voice and body explore a whole cast of characters behind the bridal facade: the egocentric infant who unabashedly slurped nourishment from her mother's body, the adolescent engaged in a sexual dance with her father, and the little girl for whom this wedding is nothing more than a glorified birthday party, with the groom no more than an outsized doll. She even brings to light the masculine qualities that had to be left behind or repressed along the way in order to create the satin-and-lace confection which stands before us.

This sequence is an example of *Urge* at its best, a combination of daring in-the-moment improvisation, emotional honesty, innovations in sound and movement ranging from the human to the non-human and back again, a challenge to the comfort level of the audience ... but all of it wonderfully, horribly familiar. The “extreme” sounds are not produced in a context of violence, madness, or any kind of social marginalization. Rather, the site for *Urge*'s radical exploration is everyday people in their everyday lives.

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#### RÉSUMÉ FRANÇAIS

En alliant la voix, le mouvement et la performance, le groupe de théâtre musical URGE explore les passions secrètes inhérentes à la vie quotidienne des femmes (la sexualité, la faim, la peur et la violence). D'une structure simple, leur performance est toutefois caractérisée par une richesse de symboles, récits de rêves et images saisissantes. Les six membres, tous des femmes, partagent les connaissances propres à leur champ de spécialisation respectif à travers un processus de d'improvisation et de co-création qui s'est avéré pour elles émancipateur autant sur le plan personnel qu'artistique. Avec son style irrévérencieux, URGE nous force à questionner nos présupposés à l'égard de la « musique » : ses différentes frontières et les jugements esthétiques qu'elles induisent.

