

# Benjamin Hatcher



**W**hat if you jumped like a kangaroo or slithered like a snake to get around? Choreographer and dance teacher Benjamin Hatcher says that just moving your body in a different way is a form of dancing. He started dancing lessons at about age 8, then moved to Montreal at 13 to study the art professionally. At 16, he created his first ballet. A few years later, he joined Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal and was soon doing solos.

In his 30s, Benjamin won critical acclaim and two prizes for choreography, including the Clifford E. Lee Award in 2002 for *The Covenant*, a ballet inspired by the Bahá'í terrace gardens in Israel. Since then, he's created a memorial dance for his father, mathematician William Hatcher, as well as works based on a fairy tale and the music of the Beatles. Benjamin and his wife Katia have two grown children and live in Montreal.

**Q:** What's your favorite childhood memory?

**A:** Going to visit granny and granddad, my father's parents, in Atlanta, Georgia. That was very exciting.

**Q:** What was the most challenging experience for you when you were a kid, and how did you handle it?

**A:** I used to get these very bad nightmares. I used to wake up screaming and very upset. And my mom would or my dad would rush in and just try to snap me out of it . . . I can't recall exactly what I was dreaming about, but it was just the atmosphere, and the mood was just so heavy and very bothersome . . . Then they went away.



**Left:** Ben began dancing when he was about 8 years old.

**Right:** Ben practiced the art of balance with a difficult one-arm handstand. He says, "Anything in life that you want to [do to] . . . strive towards perfection, takes discipline."

**Q:** How did you know you were interested in dance in the beginning?

**A:** I always loved to dance . . . I loved music, and I would put on my favorite tunes, and I would dance around in the living room . . . My Aunt Michele was a professional ballerina. She danced, and she had formed a dance company called Ballet Shayda . . . and they were very inspiring.

**Q:** Did you have a hard time being a boy who wanted to dance?

**A:** Was I made fun of? Sure . . . But . . . I don't recall really caring much about that . . . I knew that it was a noble art form. My parents introduced us to all kinds of art when I was growing up . . . Now as an adult, when I tell people what I do . . . they go, Wow, that takes a lot of discipline, doesn't it? And I say, Yes, it certainly does . . . You just practice and practice and practice . . .

Questions and  
Answers with an  
Inspirational Bahá'í



Left: *The Soul Project* was a dance Ben choreographed in memory of his father, mathematician William Hatcher.

Above: Ben collaborates with dancers during a rehearsal in April 2016.

**Q: You created a ballet at age 16. What was it like and what inspired you to do that?**

A: I had been going to dance school . . . for a few years, and the first opportunity I had to do my own choreography, I wanted to try. I think I always had a desire to create my own dances . . . It was very exciting. I always liked to listen to music when I was young and imagine movement to music that inspired me . . . I've been creating dances as much as possible over the last . . . 30 years.

**Q: What's one of your favorite experiences in your career?**

A: In 1992 when we were performing in Taiwan . . . one of my most favorite ballets. It's called *The Green Table*, and I played the role of Death . . . It's a very powerful piece, and it was a very prominent role for me. And I just remember . . . the standing ovation as I walked out to take my bow. I'll never forget it.

**Q: Can you explain what choreography is?**

A: A choreographer is someone who decides . . . what the physical movements of the dance will be, and you have to show it to [the dancers] . . . And you have to decide the pattern . . . [and] what your theme will be . . . It's very collaborative. You might have just an idea that you . . . share with a dancer or two, and then you want them to maybe improvise around that . . . A lot of it really happens with that creative spark . . . in the studio between the choreographer and the dancer.

**Q: How does the Bahá'í Faith influence you in the work you do?**

A: The Faith says that art is important just as much as science, and as a choreographer, it helped me always question . . . What am I trying to say in this choreography? It has to mean something . . . God said that he created us noble. And I think that above anything we have to think about in our art, are we reflecting our nobility . . . ?

**Q: Do you ever feel nervous before a performance?**

A: I used to get very nervous when I used to get ready for a performance . . . It's a live art form, and anything can happen onstage. And that's very exciting. But you're putting yourself in a situation where . . . you're very fragile, you're very vulnerable, because a step might not go well . . . You have to trust your training. And you have to also detach yourself and rely on God.

**Q: What's your advice for people who are self-conscious about dancing?**

A: Dance can be very therapeutic . . . It's like a meditation . . . If you're scared of being laughed at or judged when you're dancing . . . close your curtains. Put on your favorite music. And dance like you've never danced before.

**Q: What's your wish for *Brilliant Star's* readers?**

A: Every day is a gift from above . . . It's easy to forget that. And everything is going to be okay.