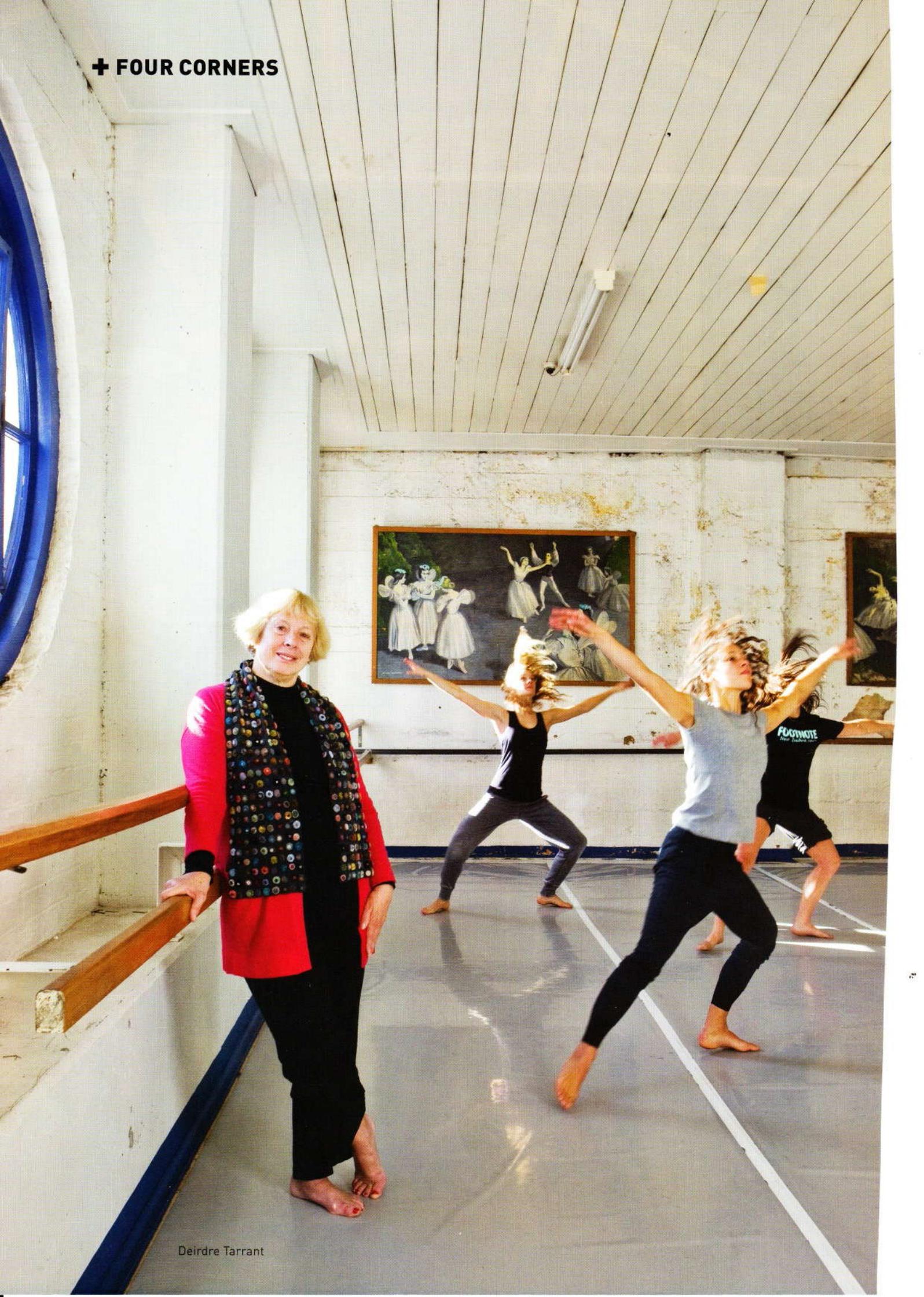


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Deirdre Tarrant

FRONT-FOOTING IT

Deirdre Tarrant is celebrating 30 years of challenging and polarising audiences through contemporary dance.

They said it wouldn't work. That a contemporary dance company would be too challenging for conservative Kiwi audiences. It turns out they were wrong. This year marks the 30th anniversary of Footnote New Zealand Dance, founded in Wellington by Deirdre Tarrant in 1985.

The mother of Flight of the Conchords' Bret McKenzie, Tarrant says Footnote evolved from her eponymous dance studio as a matter of necessity. "I needed to provide an opportunity for my students to perform, but also I was interested in doing something different."

She's lost track of the "thousands" of dancers who've passed through the doors over the years and admits she never imagined Footnote would be so successful.

"I didn't have time to think about it. I was pretty much a single mother raising three sons and running a dance studio, so it was a case of just getting on with it," she says. "But most contemporary dancers in New Zealand owe some part of their career experience to Footnote and I'm hugely proud of that. The fact it's still going strong is a testament to the staying power of contemporary dance in this country."

To celebrate, Tarrant has gathered a team of dancers, choreographers and musicians around her "who have something to say and the belief and passion to say it through movement".

Her special anniversary show, *30Forward*, will reprise several "magical moments" from the *Forte* series, a key part of the company's repertoire over the past decade. Included will be works by choreographers Raewyn Hill, Claire O'Neil, Kate MacIntosh and Jo Randerson – and Tarrant has persuaded several original alumni to appear alongside Footnote's current six dancers.

"Many of our original dancers are still performing all over the world, so it's hugely exciting to be able to get them back to New Zealand. I'm sure I'll cry the whole way through!" The tour will also feature a new work, *Flip-Pivot-Boom*, by Malia Johnstone.

For Tarrant, life has always been saturated with dance. She began teaching ballet when she was 14 and joined the Royal NZ Ballet while still at school, before being introduced to contemporary dance while living in London.

"Contemporary dance is all about challenging perceptions and reality, whether you're performing it or watching it. My idea of a good show is when people come up to me afterwards and say, 'Deirdre, that was awful!' Contemporary dance is supposed to polarise, to create a strong reaction."

Made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to dance in 2000, Tarrant still works out of the same studio where Footnote was born, a cramped space up a rickety flight of stairs in Cuba Mall. After the anniversary tour, she's hoping to step back from the company to spend more time with her five grandchildren.

"I'll keep my hand in with teaching and flying around the world as a ballet examiner but really, I think it's time to hand over the baton. Footnote is now at the point where it's doing the kind of risky work that needs to be done culturally. I'm happy with where we're at so it's time to let someone else have a go."

30Forward opens at the Opera House in Wellington on August 28 then tours Christchurch, Auckland, New Plymouth and Tauranga (for more details, visit www.footnote.org.nz).

SHARON STEPHENSON