



SOPHIE CAPE *Artist*

In early April, the cream of Sydney's eastern suburbs art set gathered for the opening of Sophie Cape's *Magistra Natura* at Olsen Irwin gallery in Woollahra. A series of red dots began steadily appearing around the room, but above the dots were not the usual blue-chip trophies of art collecting but, rather, epic gestural paintings festooned with bleached white bones and sprayed with dirt, bitumen and blood (they might have been dusted with gold, the way they were selling). Since graduating from Sydney's National Art School in 2010, Cape has been that rare breed: a painter unafraid of darkness yet a bright beacon for collectors. For Cape, blood and bones are "a symbol of all that I look for in a work," she says. In her previous life as a champion downhill ski racer, she was exposed to both: "I'd either win or I'd crash — no in between." But after retiring from sport following a serious injury, Cape (the daughter of Mosman painter Ann Cape) found her second life at art school. "Art is very much my saviour," she says. "It's my way of getting that adrenaline, that physicality." She's fast gaining momentum. *Represented by Olsen Irwin (olsenirwin.com.au), she will show as part of an Australia China Art Foundation residency in China.*

Studio soundtrack: Nick Cave, Leonard Cohen and Tom Waits

Artist inspiration: Hermann Nitsch. "I love the blood and the guts and the theatricality; [his work is] very visceral and alive."

Film: Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (1988). "Raw, emotional and beautiful but horrific at the same time."

Book: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* — Michael Fitzgerald

TAMARA DEAN

THE NEW INFLUENCERS

Meet the talents currently reshaping Australian culture, from stage to gallery to turntable. Remember these names, says NOELLE FAULKNER

OWL EYES

Singer/songwriter

The new darling of pop, a.k.a. 22-year-old Brooke Addamo, is a Melbourne chanteuse with creamy vocals and a sophisticated synth-pop sound. Addamo has been singing since she was 12, after her parents enrolled her in lessons to combat a growing shyness. She then developed a love for the performing arts, signing up for musicals and writing music throughout her teens. "I always knew I wanted to do this," she says. "I'm lucky my parents were supportive, so that pushed me to say, 'I can do this as a career.'" After the release of three EPs to critical acclaim, Addamo's debut album, *Nightswim*, is out now. "I'm not going to shy away from the fact I make pop music," she says. "I just hope that what I do is a little bit more intelligent than some of the stuff out there."

Music muses: Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Blasko and Clare Bowditch

Style: "I love Australian labels: Romance Was Born, Dion Lee, Emma Mulholland and Natasha Fagg. I like to support up-and-coming local designers."

Listening to: Metronomy, Phoenix and Jai Paul



NERVO

DJs/producers

Melbourne-born twins and former models Miriam and Olivia Nervo make up what is arguably the hottest DJ duo in the world right now. They co-wrote the euphoric, Grammy Award-winning dance anthem *When Love Takes Over* by David Guetta and Kelly Rowland, have been snapped up as faces of CoverGirl, were picked to tour with Britney Spears and Nicki Minaj, and have penned hits for Kylie Minogue, Ke\$ha and Pussycat Dolls. Finally, after years of behind-the-scenes ghostwriting, the pair are working on their debut record.

Top three party tracks:

1. Showtek & Justin Prime: *Cannonball* (Original Mix)
2. Nervo & Hook N Sling: *Reason* (Original Mix)
3. Nari & Milani vs. Otto Knows vs. One Republic: *Million Atoms to Apologize* (Hardwell vs. Thomas Gold Edit)

Inspirations: Basement Jaxx, Fat Boy Slim, The Prodigy, Jamie Jones
Beauty must-haves: CoverGirl Outlast Stay Brilliant Nail Gloss; La Prairie Skin Caviar Luxe Cream; coconut water

Best party city: Ibiza



THE APIARY *Film collective*

Fantasy, mystery and beauty — not words normally associated with documentary filmmaking. That is unless you live within the cool world of Gavin Youngs and Lily Coates, a.k.a. The Apiary. The Melbourne-based duo has been producing short films, documentaries and stage projections for The Australian Ballet for more than three years — understandably, as they have a rare ability to go behind the scenes while keeping intact the enigmatic allure of ballet. Following their success with various dance and fashion films, as well as commissions from SBS's subscription channel Studio and Arts Victoria, Youngs says they're increasingly being approached by major companies and given complete creative control to produce super-stylised work that evokes a brand's essence, minus any logos or corporate ownership. "It does seem that companies are moving away from direct branding to create more of a 'feeling,'" he says. "Feeling" is another word for The Apiary's signature mix of emotion, narrative and fairy dust. Who wouldn't want to be part of their world?

The Apiary's new film, *Ballet Men*, will premiere on The Australian Ballet's YouTube channel, youtube.com/TheAustralianBallet, this month; theapiary.com.au.

Inspirational places: MONA; Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris; cross-country trains

Online addictions: africasacountry.com; butdoesitfloat.com

Favourite filmmakers: Michael Haneke, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Louis Malle



ANNA DAVIS *Curator*

Museum of Contemporary Art Australia's "accidental curator" says she fell into the profession after studying media arts and having a strong desire to support her art-school colleagues. "I wanted to help make things happen, not just for me, but for other artists, and then at some point realised that that was actually curating," she says. Prior to the MCA, Davis cut her teeth at small galleries and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, where she assisted Wayne Tunnicliffe, now head curator of Australian art. She's learnt that it's about balance, support and creativity.

"It's having the artist in the gallery and encouraging them to make the best work they can, considering how it will translate to an audience and creating an experience or story through different works," she says. Davis has curated the past two Primavera shows, the MCA's annual young artist showcase, and her gift for spotting the next big thing has made her a valuable asset to the gallery. "I think being an artist and becoming a curator has given me empathy for the artist's perspective," she says. "I would say my approach is more artist-led than art-historical. I respond to what I see being made by artists."

Reading: *The Wild Life of Sailor and Lula* by Barry Gifford; Geoff Dyer's essays in *Working the Room*

The last piece of art I wanted to buy: Justine Varga's *Moving Out #6*, 2012. "Her photography is quiet and [at 2012 Primavera] she had three works, almost white, with fine wire circles and what looked like a sunburst hitting the room. I fell in love with that sunburst."

Right now I'm into ... "ephemeral practice: work that appears and disappears, like Rebecca Baumann's work made of smoke or confetti".



SAM STRONG *Director*

The newly appointed associate artistic director of the Melbourne Theatre Company is a lesson in following passions. Up until only a few years ago, Strong was a lawyer-slash-dramaturge about to become a bar-at-law before his longtime love of theatre won out. Following work with independent companies including Chapel off Chapel, Melbourne's La Mama, Red Stitch and the Griffin Theatre, Strong has joined the MTC during an exciting time — the 2013 season is perhaps its most anticipated to date. This month, Strong directs David Wenham in what he refers to as his "dream project", Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. "It's one of the most powerful experiences you can have at the theatre, and unleashing that power on an audience, with some of Australia's finest actors, is a real privilege," he says of the project.

Strong has built a reputation for favouring intense emotion and audience-moving themes and says he only intends to take his work ever higher, rattling off a near-future wish list that includes tackling iconic plays such as Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, as well as trying his hand at opera and feature films. The future of Australian theatre? He is, undeniably.

The Crucible is on June 22–August 3, Southbank Theatre, mtc.com.au.

Biggest inspiration: "I'm most inspired by listening to and playing music. Whenever I'm working on a show I will make a deliberately eclectic playlist."

Strong's *The Crucible* playlist:

1. "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" soundtrack by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross. Especially the track *Later Into the Night*, for its gloom and ominous mood."
2. "The Chaconne from the *Violin Partita in D Minor*, because it's Bach being both precise and passionate."
3. "The soundtrack to *Ulysses' Gaze* by Eleni Karaindrou, especially *Ulysses' Theme* for its haunting effect with minimal elements."
4. "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together" by Taylor Swift, because it's teenage like the girls in *The Crucible* — and it's catchy."
5. "Cross Road Blues" by Robert Johnson, for another version of pacts with the devil and its rustic simplicity."

NICOLE DURLING *Curator*

Her face seems caught in a permanent grin, not the lofty expression one might expect from someone with perhaps the coolest art gig in the country. But Durling is too busy having fun as senior curator of Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA). "These curator superstars who fly around the world? It's not my style," she insists. Instead, the world's been flying to MONA since gambling millionaire David Walsh opened his museum of "sex and death" in January 2011 — more than 800,000 people, in fact. Most recently, Durling and colleague Olivier Varenne have been dusting off MONA's new exhibition opus, *The Red Queen*, which charts evolutionary theory as a theme through art history.

Durling's own evolution as a curator has been equally dramatic. Raised on a sheep farm in Victoria, Durling spent much of her twenties as a sculptor. But working alone in a studio, she soon realised, "wasn't good for my personality or my mental health — I needed to get out".

The Red Queen is on June 19–April 21, 2014. Dark MOFO, celebrating Tasmania's long winter nights, explores ancient and contemporary mythologies and religious and secular traditions, from June 13–23, mona.net.au.

Durling's top five art destinations:

1. Sir John Soane's Museum, London: "It has such a sense of personality and is a fascinating random collection of objects that make up an incredible experience."
2. Melbourne Museum: "The weird and dusty place where I saw my first Egyptian exhibition — I was 10 — which had a big impact on me."
3. The Prado, Madrid: "Seeing Goya's *Black Paintings*, I cried. I still remember what I ate that day and the weather. That stuff stays with you."
4. Palais de Tokyo, Paris: "For a contemporary space I always love what they do — they have a music program and just this cool kind of raw, industrial space."
5. Anselm Kiefer's studio complex, Barjac, France: "The scale and the ambition of it was just beyond comprehension. It was an all-encompassing experience in the most beautiful part of the world." — MF



PAUL PHILIPSON; COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF OLD AND NEW ART/REMI CHAUVIN; SALLY FLEGG; COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART



IGGY AZALEA *Rapper*

Meet Mullumbimby-raised, US-based Iggy Azalea, Australia's answer to the current fashion and pop culture obsession with female rappers — not that she's been home in a while. After leaving Australia for Miami at 16, the now 22-year-old moved around the US, finally settling in Atlanta, fine-tuning her rap skills along the way and proving herself as a white Australian country girl who can kick it like Azealia Banks and Nicki Minaj. Last year she released an EP and a mixtape, was picked up by a major record label and a modelling agency and fronted a House of Holland Eyewear campaign; this month she's performing at the Chime for Change concert in London, an initiative founded by Gucci and creatively directed by Beyoncé, no less. Her single *Work* is out now, and her debut album, *The New Classic*, is set to drop later this year. **Most-loved rappers:** Tupac, Method Man, Missy Elliott, Busta Rhymes **Style icons:** Grace Kelly, Gwen Stefani, Fran Fine from *The Nanny*



ELIZABETH DEBICKI *Actor*

Some people have the power to alter the air of any room they walk into. Cate Blanchett has it, Tilda Swinton has it, Kate Moss has it, and 22-year-old Elizabeth Debicki has it. And 2013 is her year. This month she stars onscreen as society girl Jordan Baker in *The Great Gatsby*, and onstage alongside Blanchett and Isabelle Huppert in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Maids*. Of *Gatsby*, her second feature film, she says playing Jordan felt surprisingly natural. "She's callous — not exactly sugar and spice and all things nice. But I found the part incredibly liberating — she's just so ballsy. It really gave me courage to make bolder choices."

With her theatre background, Debicki admits she sees *The Maids* as a dream job equal to *Gatsby*, being a huge fan of Blanchett, Huppert and the play's director, Benedict Andrews. Debicki intends to balance theatre and film work, both here and abroad. "There are wonderful things happening in Australia all the time," she says, "but when you are overseas, because of people like Cate, Nicole [Kidman] and Geoffrey Rush, you feel real pride as an Aussie actor. These people have given us a great reputation for being interesting, individual artists. I would just love to uphold that name and tradition."

The Great Gatsby is in cinemas from May 30; *The Maids* is at Sydney Theatre Company from June 4–July 20, sydneytheatre.com.au.

Reading: *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert

Inspirations: "I drink coffee, I read books, I go to galleries — and I love travelling and being in cities."



LEIF PODHAJSKY *Digital artist & creative director*

Swirling clouds, mirrored pyramids, glittering rivers and psychedelic flowers ... Podhajsky's kaleidoscopic manipulations are all-consuming, mesmerising and in high demand, as this UK-based designer has brought back the cult of the album cover artist, after it was said to be lost forever to the digital revolution. Best known for his work with Tame Impala, his first client and the one that kicked off his career in cover art, Podhajsky has also worked with musicians such as Lykke Li, Foals, Grimes and Birds of Tokyo, to name a few. His coveted and often imitated style has him on the speed dial of some of the most influential record companies as well as in-the-know design lovers — he recently launched a collection of printed silk scarfs and his work hangs on the wall of the exclusive Soho House club's Mayfair outpost. Podhajsky, who has a background in graphic design, explores themes of symmetry, geometric patterns and movement in nature — perhaps a reflection of his Byron Bay upbringing — and how these relate to music and its makers. The beauty of his work is that he blurs the lines between art and design, digital and analogue, screen and print, the future and the past.

Check out Leif's blog, *Melt* (visualmelt.com), for mixtapes, art and digital inspiration.

Artist inspiration: Egon Schiele, Caspar David Friedrich and Hieronymus Bosch

Reading: *Demian* by Hermann Hesse; *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami;

The Lord of the Rings by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien; and *National Geographic* magazine

Listening to: *Noctuary* by The Holydrug Couple and *World Music* by Goat



SILVANA AZZI HERAS *Costume & title designer*

Azzi Heras believes in fate, which figures: her career is apparently shaped by it. Catherine Martin, production designer and Baz Luhrmann's partner, called Azzi Heras's design lecturer during her final year of university and requested the best student produce some work for their production company, Bazmark Inq. "Lucky for me [the top student] was busy and I wasn't," Azzi Heras says with a smile. Fifteen years later, Azzi Heras is an essential cog in the Bazmark wheel, having worked on the company's most prestigious projects, from *Moulin Rouge!* to the Chanel No. 5 short film starring Nicole Kidman, Puccini's *La Bohème* on Broadway and, most recently, as assistant costume designer and title designer on *The Great Gatsby*. She tells of the months

of research that went into *Gatsby*: "We had several costume workshops with the actors before we even started pre-production in Australia," she says. "A lot of the time in NYC was spent rummaging through the laces and fabrics at Solstiss as well as working on men's suits with Brooks Brothers, going through Tiffany & Co. archives and working with Prada, who designed Daisy's party dress as well as 40 evening dresses." It's clear that she's as mad about details as her bosses.

Most loved era: "The 1920s: the clothes, the hair, the makeup, the parties, the graphics, the cars ..."

Favourite film: *A Single Man*. "The simplicity and pace, the sets, the costumes ... effortless and beautiful."

Favourite scenes: "Mélanie Laurent putting up the neon letters outside the cinema in *Inglourious Basterds* — magical. And Kuntzel+Deygas's idiosyncratic title sequence in *Catch Me If You Can*."

JESS SCULLY *Curator/festival director*

Self-styled "slashie" Jess Scully has her fingers in a lot of pies. She's been the creative director of Qantas's Spirit of Youth Awards, a magazine editor, freelance writer, policy advisor to the New South Wales minister for the arts and is currently the festival director of Vivid Ideas, as well as a TEDx curator.

Scully studied journalism and law with every intention of becoming a political journalist, but says it was her love of fashion and the arts that led her to where she is now. The bubbly and charismatic 32-year-old's passion runs deep and she now works across all creative industries, tapping into the cultural zeitgeist and forming ideas for the projects she curates, making her one of the most in-demand creatives in her field. "I love connecting people," she says. "I'm not in film, architecture or design but I talk to a lot of amazing people in each of those industries, do the carryover and say, 'Hey, architect A, what you do is awesome. Did you know that fashion designer B is doing this too?' I guess it's like being a pollinating bee."

Vivid Ideas is on May 24–June 10.

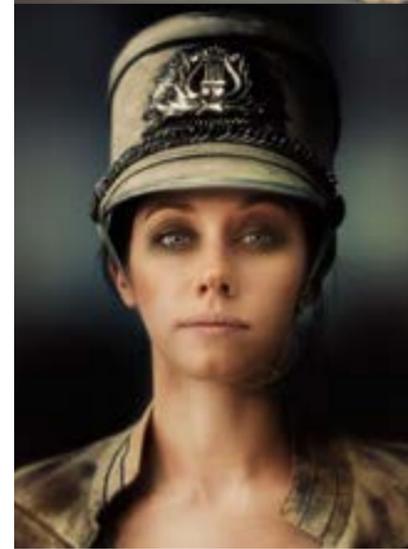
Inspired by: TED.com. "I was lucky enough to attend TEDActive in Palm Springs this year. It was one of the most enlightening weeks of my life. I watch lots of TED videos, too. You can absorb a world-changing idea in 10 minutes."

Listening to and watching: Radio National and ABC iview. "I'm a big fan of live radio and podcasts, and I also spend a crazy amount of time watching documentaries on ABC iview."

New experience: Riding a bike. "Being a bike person changes everything. You ride though the city at a different pace, you run into people, you have conversations — it's kind of amazing!"



ROBIN HEARFIELD; PAXI; RAHI REZVANI



DANIELLE ROWE *Dancer*

After 10 years at The Australian Ballet as a principal artist and 18 months at the Houston Ballet, Shepparton-born Rowe last year switched from classical to contemporary to join the prestigious Nederlands Dans Theater. Rowe, who is often praised for her graceful, delicate style and flawless classical execution, says it was an itch for change that sparked the move: "[In Houston] I was doing a lot of traditional ballet roles that I'd always wanted to do, but I got to this point where I was craving to move differently, to be uncomfortable. I have always been intrigued by the NDT and I love that we draw upon the ballet vocabulary, but take it into a different direction where you move your body in all these weird and won-

derful ways. I love being part of the creative process, rather than learning steps that have been done for years." There is a heightened buzz around Rowe right now, as this month she performs her first Australian show since she danced in The Australian Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* two and a half years ago.

Nederlands Dans Theater will perform at Sydney Opera House June 12–15.

Favourite ballet: "*Bella Figura*. It made me fall in love with contemporary dance and made me come to NDT. The Australian Ballet is about to perform it." [Part of *Vanguard*, until May 18 at Sydney Opera House; at Arts Centre Melbourne from June 6.]

Travel destination: "Melbourne. It's home and I absolutely adore it."

ALICE BABIDGE *Production, set & costume designer*

With her infectious laugh, sunny personality and endless creativity, it's easy to see why the theatrical world wants to work with Babidge. Her collaboration credits span the English National Opera, Sydney Theatre Company (STC), Sydney's Belvoir theatre to music videos and films, from shorts to Justin Kurzel's acclaimed *Snowtown*. The NIDA-trained designer says a passion for costumes has always been in her, recalling how she would redesign actors' dresses, "mostly big ball gowns", as a child. "I loved drama, but was a terrible actor," she says. "I loved the spectacle of it and the idea of creating a world onstage."

This month, Babidge's world is the set and costumes for Benedict Andrews's production of *The Maids* starring Cate Blanchett and Isabelle Huppert. Says STC co-artistic director Andrew Upton, "Alice doesn't just have her finger on the pulse, she is the pulse, with a throbbing, sequined heart." Blanchett agrees: "She has altered the way I look at the world." As one of the busiest women in her field, Babidge admits she works superhuman-hard, but says it's all worth it. "I love it," she enthuses. "The act of theatre and the act of performance, and I love the idea of presenting a story, because that's the core of what we do."

The Maids, June 8–July 20, Sydney Theatre Company, sydneytheatre.com.au.

Favourite film costume: Gwyneth Paltrow's "excellent fur coat" in *The Royal Tenenbaums*.

Currently listening to: James Blake and Wu-Tang Clan. "The juxtaposition between my work and music like Wu-Tang is really useful."

Reading: *Franny and Zooey* by J.D. Salinger and *The Fight* by Normal Mailer. "Not necessarily influencing my work, but they make my brain work differently, keeping it open to possibilities."

Play I'm looking forward to seeing: "Simon Stone's *Hamlet* [October 12–December 1, Belvoir, belvoir.com.au]. That's my pick for the year."



BENJA HARNEY *Artist*

From pop-up books to intricate sculptures both bijou and enormous, this self-taught “paper engineer” is yet to meet his match when it comes to the possibilities of paper. He created a giant cartoon set for Romance Was Born’s S/S 12-13 show; a supersized floral installation that dangled from the roof of Sydney’s QVB; and a pop-up book for Kylie Minogue. Harney’s hawk eye and fine motor skills are so sought-after that he became the first Australian invited to take up a residency within the prestigious Hermès “Petit h” program at the house’s Parisian atelier. There, he worked with artisans and designers to create incredible works using Hermès’s leather offcuts.

Harney’s craftsmanship continues to create waves on a global scale; recently he worked on a project with Google and presented his beautiful pop-ups in Seoul as part of the World Pop-Up Art Exhibition at Art Center IDA. But his heart lies in his studio. “My studio is the epicentre of my creative output. It’s a space where I can make lots of mess, which allows me to dream big,” he says. One look into this inspiring cave of folded, cut and rolled curiosities and it’s easy to see his love for paper is boundless.

Reading: Irving Harper’s *Works in Paper*

Luxury: “Having a whole day to cook something incredible, like boeuf bourguignon.”

Inspiration: “The street. I’m a very visual person, so the art of ‘looking’ at the world is very important to my creative process. An idea or a spark can come from anywhere, usually when one least expects it.”



GRACIE OTTO *Filmmaker & actor*

For more than two years, Otto has been working on a self- and crowdfunded documentary that tells the story of one of the most important and flamboyant film and theatrical producers in London, Michael “Chalky” White. “We say he is a social connector,” says Otto. “He has always looked after women and is always looking for the next big thing; he knew Kate Moss when she was, like, 18, and Naomi Watts [an associate producer of the film], when she was 25 — he took her to all the right parties and introduced her to the right people.”

Otto first met White in Cannes in 2010. Her curiosity was piqued, and he invited her to one of his celebrity-studded dinner parties. “I began asking about him and everyone was like, ‘You have to talk to this person and to this person’, and it just snowballed.” The end result is more than 50 interviews conducted around the world with celebrities and theatre icons. “I think it’s important to give back; I want Michael to know how loved he is,” she says. Having grown up in the theatre world (Otto is the daughter of actor Barry Otto and sister of Miranda Otto), she is a great champion of the stage. “That world has changed so much, so I think it’s important to put the significance of the theatre out there, especially to the younger generation,” she says. “Many people my age wouldn’t even know how much of an impact Michael has had on culture, but it’s something I really want everyone to see.”

Gracie Otto stars in *Alex Munt’s Poor Little Rich Girls*, an homage to Andy Warhol’s 1965 Pop Art film (minus the “s”) starring Edie Sedgwick, which screens at Vivid festival on May 31, vividssydney.com.

All-time favourite directors: David Lynch, Sofia Coppola, Julie Delpy and Xavier Dolan

Really looking forward to seeing: *War Horse*. “I try to see most plays at Belvoir and STC.”

Current obsession: “Collecting film soundtracks. I get inspired by locations and music before stories.”

Reading: “A Katharine Hepburn biography [*Kate Remembered: Katharine Hepburn, A Personal Biography* by A. Scott Berg, Simon & Schuster] at the moment, which I really love. I have also read Grace Kelly’s and Bette Davis’s biographies — I love these old Hollywood women who were so independent, in a way.”

TIM RICHARDSON; PRUE RUSCOE; MCLEAN STEPHENSON; GETTY IMAGES



ALICE TOPP *Ballerina & choreographer*

It’s hard to believe, but after 50 years of The Australian Ballet, there is yet to be a resident female choreographer. Bendigo-born Alice Topp is on her way to being the first. Three years ago, when a choreographer pulled out of *Bodytorque*, an annual showcase of rising ballet stars, The Australian Ballet artistic director David McAllister invited Topp, who clocks up eight shows a week as a dancer in the corps de ballet, to create a work for the series. Naturally, she jumped at the chance.

“I was a wild card,” she insists. “I was just a corps dancer — no one had heard of me. The other choreographers were principals, and were all men.” (It should be noted that the first *Bodytorque* series, *Women on Men*, had an all-female choreographer list.) Topp says she went into it without expectations, created a work that was about fashion and dance, and it turned out to be her most rewarding experience yet. In fact, her 2010 work, *Trace*, was so well received she was invited back twice more and this October she will premiere a collaboration with fashion designer Toni Matičevski for the series. “Choreography is a very specialised area, and I’m lucky to be in the best position to learn, so being the first female resident would be a dream,” she says of the future. “But I will never get sick of dancing *Swan Lake*.”

Alice Topp is currently dancing in *Vanguard*, in Sydney until May 18 and Melbourne June 6–July 17; her *Bodytorque*. *Technique* work is performed October 31–November 3, australianballet.com.au.

Art as inspiration: “I draw on different art forms more than I do watching dance. Photography, drawing, illustration, paintings and text can be a reference, or a provocative thought I might come back to when trying to describe a mood or a feeling that I want my dancers to convey.”

Favourite ballets: *Manon*; *Divergence* by Stanton Welch; and *Dyad 1929* by Wayne McGregor

Beauty must-haves: “[Dancers’] skin can get irritated due to all the heavy makeup and washing our faces often. Aesop Oil Free Facial Hydrating Serum and Camellia Nut moisturiser are my holy grail products.”

THE FALLS *Musicians*

Sydney-based Folk duo Simon Rudston-Brown and Melinda Kirwin met while studying at Sydney’s Conservatorium of Music, fell in love, fought, made up and then broke up, the whole time crafting an autobiographical record of their relationship in the form of a heartfelt EP, *Hollywood*, which they released to critical acclaim last year — on their own terms. The duo remains self-promoted and managed, a shining example of DIY culture.

“I think there were moments where we thought it was going to be too hard,” admits Kirwin. “With everything that happened with us — even while going through a hideous break-up, we had just worked so hard, so we saw it through.” The duo admits that occasionally, playing the songs can hit a raw nerve, but from a selfish listener’s perspective, this is what makes The Falls so uniquely beautiful. “Performing can be very emotional, but it means so much to us as it is representative of who we are,” says Kirwin.

It’s not all self-promotion, though: the duo also started Folk Club, a regular live music night in Sydney which has given other artists a much-needed platform.

The Falls have just returned from a self-funded North American tour, where they performed at Canadian Music Week and the coveted SXSW festival. The duo grabbed the attention of heavyweight agents in the States simply through word of mouth — a phenomenon repeated on our shores, with invites flowing in to support international acts on tour. It’s significant that the agents behind these invites are often overlooking their own signings in favour of this independent duo — a testament to both their talent and the level of support the Australian music industry is showing towards DIY artists. “So many people say this industry is tough and people are really critical, but it’s not all true,” says Kirwin. “There are so many generous people out there who just care about good music.” Count us in.

Listening to: Simon & Garfunkel, Neil Young, The Byrds, The Rolling Stones

Artists as inspirations: “Yoko Ono; designers like Lover and Kate Sylvester; F. Scott Fitzgerald; and our photographer friends Carine Thevenau, Mclean Stephenson and Dean Podmore.”

Personal idols: “Artists like The Lumineers and Passenger, who have forged their own, sometimes unconventional, paths and have given us the courage to do the same.”

