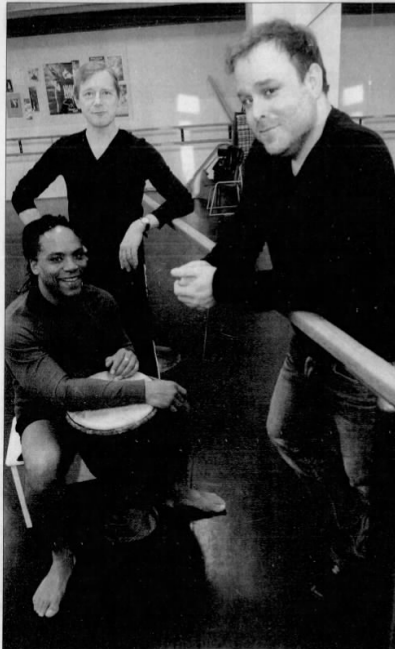


RICK MERCER STILL GOING STRONG. B3

ARTS & LIFE

BREAKING NEWS AT LEADERPOST.COM

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Chancez Perry, Glen Curtis and Richard Zimich, from left, of Youth Ballet & Contemporary Dance of Saskatchewan, are the male dance instructors at the school.

MAKING CHANGE

Artist given green light to revamp coins

MELLOY LAU
POSTMEDIA NEWS

However, moose and maple leaves—those are the markers on our national currency that we're come to associate with our country's identity. But Gary Taxali wants to change that.

The internationally renowned artist has teamed up with the Royal Canadian Mint for a series of six 2012 celebratory coins that promise to bring ice cream cones, tooth fairs and even smiley faces to our quarters.

The Toronto-based artist, whose clients range from The New York Times and Rolling Stone to Corvee and Levi's, was contracted by the mint to design the coins in its 2012 gift sets, each reflecting a specific theme. Given complete artistic freedom, Taxali brought new life to the theme of heritage, new baby, wedding, tooth fairy, holiday and O Canada.

"Creative freedom is kind of an overstatement," Taxali says in an interview. "A few days before the coins are set to be unveiled Jan. 24."

"It was easy. Fluid, balanced and it was fun and collaborative. It was so much creative freedom that it got to the point where I was waiting for some higher-up to be like, 'Oh, this is crazy, we can't do that!'"

"I'm sure it was hard for them to say 'Yeah' because it's a bit of a leap on their part, since the themes in the past tended to be a bit on the conservative side, in terms of imagery," he adds.

"Mine are little wacky characters with their tongues sticking out. I didn't feel once I'd compromised myself."

Beyond that, the Royal Mint allowed a few liberties. Taxali was allowed to imprint his initials on each coin and also used his own retro-inspired font called Chomp, in short, he got the "entire real estate."

"I had a madman job and every time I talk about it, the only word I really describe is 'honor,'" says Taxali, who has also written a children's book (This Is Silly) and designed

Grammy-nominated album art for U2, indie star Altona Mann. "It's a huge, huge honor to be bestowed this kind of privilege and we came up with a really good representation of my work."

The coin Taxali is most proud of is the wedding-themed edition, featuring two interlocking rings that represent a gender-neutral marriage. "I live in a country where gender is irrelevant and the coin has to represent that," says the 40-year-old, who also holds a teaching position at the Ontario College of Art and Design. "I thought it would be a nice thing to represent that and to show two rings: Is one a man and one a woman? Two women? It doesn't matter what they are, they represent the union of two people."

"I think this is probably the first piece of currency in the world paid for by a federal government that is pro-wedding regardless of gender and that makes me really happy."

The significance behind the coin, as Taxali explains, is also indicative of our evolving cultural identity outside of the conservative image of wildlife, foliage and hockey that otherwise dominate our currency.

"I think it says that our country is young and open-minded. I think that it says we're cool," he says.

"We've got something to say and maybe this is a bit of a benchmark — it says that our money and our stamps are a reflection of the citizens."

Taxali also hopes the project will spark more collaborations between the mint and Canada's best of undisputed illustrators.

"There are so many artists that would do so many amazing coins," he says.

"The stuff that we use to represent Canadian symbols should be made by people who have different views and ideas, because that's what the country is comprised of."

For more information on Gary Taxali's 2012 Royal Canadian Mint gift sets, visit mint.ca and garytaxali.com.

New program helps change attitudes

Dance, ballet are not just for females

BARBARA WOOLLEY
FOR THE LEADERPOST

As a little kid, Richard Zimich went to soccer practice with not just his sneakers, but ballet slippers. After the game, he couldn't hang out — he would always say he had to go "out the grass."

"To sure my immediate thought, 'Wow that guy is cutting the grass an awful lot,'" laughed Zimich, who is now the artistic director of Youth Ballet & Contemporary Dance of Saskatchewan (YBCDS). "But it's because I was actually on my way to dance class."

Sometimes young male dancers are shy about their passion, said Zimich. But that is something YBCDS is trying to change.

The studio now employs four male dance teachers — Zimich, Glen Curtis, Chancez Perry and William Sigman — which is the most it's ever had. When Zimich came to Regina four years ago, there hadn't been one in two decades.

A growing number of boys are also taking lessons — right now there are about 13 of 40 total students, he said. In bigger cities, a better ratio of guys to girls is more commonplace, which makes it easier.

So in September, Zimich had the idea of starting a program just for the boys. It's been a huge hit.

"It's not easy being in a class sometimes when you're the only guy," he said.

"IT'S NOT EASY BEING IN A CLASS SOMETIMES WHEN YOU'RE THE ONLY GUY," RICHARD ZIMICH

"When the girls are getting instruction, sometimes the guys can feel like they are an aside. They're role (in dance) is totally different. So this program brings them to grow and train together."

"I was definitely the Billy Elliot of Saskatchewan," laughed Curtis, YBCDS' sweet male teacher. "I really liked dancing. I was just the only boy in the school. If there was a boys program, I wouldn't have kept my mouth shut."

In class, the guys do all types of movement from

hiphop and jazz to martial arts. It is great exercise and builds endurance, balance and physical strength.

"The parents are so happy to see their kids going to dancing and getting pumped before they even go," he said. "The boys are so motivated to come. They're giving me high-fives in the hallway and I can see they're really proud of what they're doing."

Lessons are twice a week, but Zimich said that may expand this year. A lot of boys are bringing their friends to come check out the class — and the friends end up staying.

"They have that support. If you get laughed or teased at school, it doesn't even really matter because you're around people that know better," said Zimich. "There's still a pressure, but it's starting to get better."

