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## Island home grounds dancer

By **Mike Brassard**

"We're doing a run through this afternoon at The Distillery. Would you like to see it?" asked Shannon Cooney over the telephone.

Without hesitation, the invite was accepted. Watching works in progress is a privilege not often given. She is a co-founder of Platform 33 Dance Collective.

Cooney's passion about her art and her dance is very strong. While her art takes her all over the world, something about Toronto—specifically Toronto Island where she lives—grounds her and keeps her here for her world premiere of three evocative, but very different pieces, "L'Avenir," "Seven Ways to Tell Time," and "Shelf Life."

Although growing up in the GTA, Cooney first moved to Toronto Island 10 years ago. "Incredible," is how Cooney described its solitude, peace and nature. "You get to know people in the community—it's isolation, but it's unity. Someone will help you with your groceries off the boat. Someone will pick up your daughter."

Relating Toronto Island to her art form as a dancer, Cooney said, "Dance is not solo, the community is very inspiring."

Her affinity with Toronto Island is very strong.

"Back in 1999, I did a rehearsal at the Wards Island Association building in exchange for hand washing the windows. Time and labour here are as valuable as money is in the city."

This sense of community, or connectedness extends to Cooney's dance. During her studies at York University, Cooney shifted from jazz and tap as she began to see dance as an art form rather than as entertainment. "It is very dear to my heart to make that distinction. I believe dance is an expression—communication. It is about openness, I can communicate emotions, philosophy, ideas."

"Train four from Barcelona now leaving on Platform..." Cooney intoned over the phone and chuckled as she started describing where the inspiration for Platform 33 came from.

Platform 33 was formed in fall 2001. The 33 came from the age that Cooney, Julia Aplin and Susan Elliott were at that time. It was Julia Aplin's idea: they had gotten to the point that an avenue where dancers would make the decisions was needed. Platform 33 was just that avenue, a platform for ideas and communication—a platform of many meanings—a starting place. Also, "It was the idea of being on the road," Cooney said.

For L'Avenir, Seven Ways to Tell Time and Shelf Life, they spent time with the choreographers—Barcelona's Damian Muñoz, Montreal's Louise Bédard and Japan's Kim Itoh—living with them, eating with them, and drinking, talking, absorbing their culture, their emotions.

In the practice studio, with her dark eyes shining and her whole being glowing after running through a good hour's worth of physical movement in perfect synch with Susan Elliott and Dancework's Linnea Swan (who is replacing a very pregnant Julia Aplin), Cooney said that she is communicating something through her dance, and that each person will experience and feel something different and unique.

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**Shannon Cooney (middle)**

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