

Members of Motus O Dance Theatre perform *Petrouchka* on the back deck of the artistic directors' Stouffville home in the summer of 2003.

Motus O Celebrates 15th Anniversary

Stouffville's Motus O Dance Theatre celebrates its 15th anniversary with a gala fundraiser at Markham Theatre on Nov. 4.

The collective was founded by artistic directors and performers Jack Langenhuizen and James and Cynthia Croker, who originally opted to share a house in Stouffville because the community was the closest place to Toronto they could afford. When they arrived, they drew some neighbourly interest, since they were not exactly your average family.

"There was the 'gay' stage," explained James, with a disarming grin. "People came round asking if Chanel (James and Cynthia's daughter) had a mother. Then there was the 'other man' stage. When our son drew a picture of his family at school it included dad, mum and Jack. They thought Jack was an imaginary friend."

It was also not unusual to see members of the collective rehearsing a work in progress in the backyard. On one memorable occasion, they performed *Petrouchka*, a witty

and colourful tale of a wizard and his three marionettes, on their back deck, to the delight of a large and appreciative audience of neighbours and friends.

"We were very eclectic in our training," said Jack. "Cynthia was in university as a music major and James came from a mime and street theatre background." Cynthia was also a gymnast, while James was brought up in Australia where he was a sheep shearer, a skill which he finds of little or no use in his current creative endeavours.

Jack studied a wide range of dance disciplines, as well as musical theatre and figure skating. The trio's collaboration is fluid and creative, and rigid performance rules have no place in their repertoire. "We knew we weren't going to do pure dance, but that we would work in some kind of physical genre," Jack said.

The physicality of their performances is astonishing; they mix athleticism with dance, mime and voice, which gives their work wide appeal, even among those whose

interest in the arts is minimal. Although humour is usually an important ingredient, both in full-length works like *Alice* and the wonderfully macabre short piece *The Bench*, they also explore the dark side of human nature in more sombre works such as *The Shunning*.

They are amused by people who regard 'real' art as an exclusive club reserved for sophisticated urbanites. "They are preaching that you should come up to their level and then you will understand them. To them, rural Ontario is anything above Eglinton," observed James. "Our philosophy is to get (the audience) laughing and they'll have a hard time shooting you."

Motus O Dance Theatre's 15th anniversary performance, followed by a gala reception, takes place at 7 p.m. Nov. 4 at Markham Theatre. The evening will feature short pieces, including old favourites and new works, performed by company members and guest artists.

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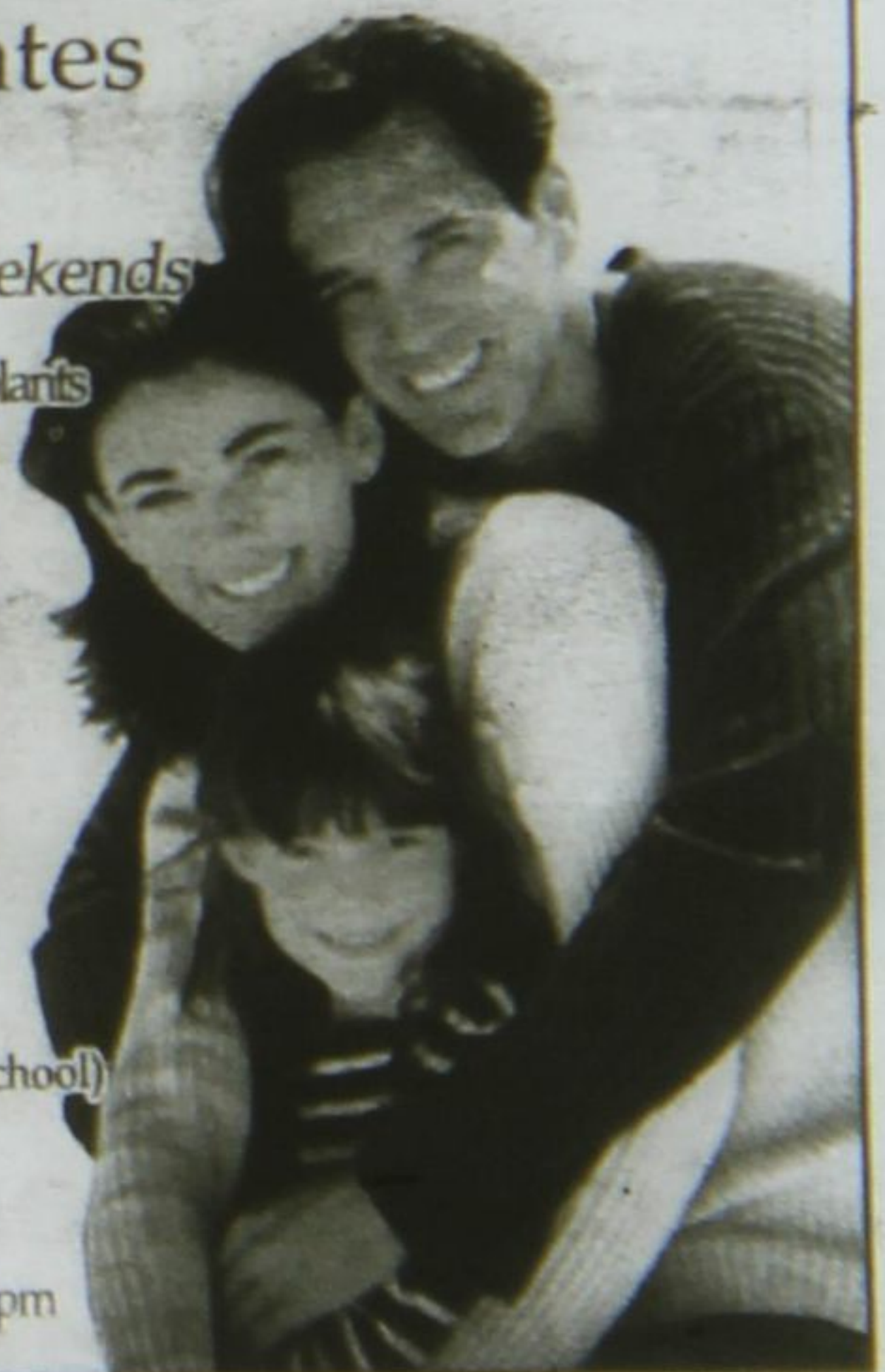


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