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Ballet school, ex-staffer being sued by former student

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Bruce Monk, a former Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancer, instructor, and photographer allegedly took nude photos of some of the RWB's dancers and sold them online.

A proposed class-action lawsuit is seeking compensation for Royal Winnipeg Ballet students who say they were victimized by a former instructor and photographer who

allegedly took nude photos of some dancers and sold them online.

Bruce Monk has previously denied all allegations against him arising from his three decades of employment at the Winnipeg ballet school, and no criminal charges were ever laid.

The RWB has denied any knowledge of wrongdoing and previously told the *Free Press* an internal investigation at the school found its authorities didn't know about Monk's alleged nude photo shoots with students.

But the class-action suit, filed in Toronto on behalf of former RWB student Sarah Doucet, seeks financial damages from Monk and the RWB, alleging the school is "vicariously" liable for Monk's actions – which it says include breach of trust, sexual violence and breach of privacy.

Monk was fired from the school in 2015.

Toronto lawyer Margaret Waddell, a partner with Waddell Phillips, the firm pursuing the class-action claim, said it still needs to be certified by the courts. If that happens, she said, other former Royal Winnipeg Ballet students who were photographed by Monk "in a private setting" could join the court process for compensation.

"We're bringing the class action because we believe the action will be successful and that there will be compensation for the women at the end of the process, whether it's sooner or later. At this stage, we don't know how the defendants are going to react to it, but we feel very confident in our case," Waddell said.

The suit is not bound by a statute of limitations under Ontario law.

"The criminal system can only do so much. They have limited resources and limited legislative parameters that they have to work between, and the civil law goes a lot further. Here, we've got (allegations of) breaches of trust, breaches of fiduciary duty, we've got allegations of sexual assault and sexual abuse, as well as the failures of the institution to protect the children that it was supposed to be protecting," she said.

In a statement to the *Free Press*, the RWB acknowledged the lawsuit but did not name Monk.

"The RWB has been served with a statement of claim by a former student of the RWB school. The complaint is in reference to actions of an individual who was employed by the RWB as a teacher at the time of the allegations. When initial allegations against this individual came to light approximately two-and-a-half years ago, the RWB removed him from his role and subsequently terminated him. The RWB is committed to the safety, security and well-being of every student entrusted to our care and we take this responsibility very seriously. We have a number of protocols in place to safeguard our students, and these are reviewed on a regular basis," it said.

None of the allegations have been proven.

Monk and the RWB are also defending themselves against a similar lawsuit filed in Manitoba's Court of Queen's Bench last year by a former student. The woman is seeking damages from Monk and the school, claiming he compelled her to take her clothes off during a photo shoot in a locked RWB boiler room when she was 16 and asked her to sit in a "frog" pose.

In a statement of defence to that claim filed this year, Monk denied photographing the woman privately while she was an underage student. He admitted having photo shoots with her on six occasions in 2000, some of which he admits occurred on school property, when she was no longer a student.

In his statement of defence, Monk said he was terminated from RWB because of the "media attention" surrounding the allegations against him.

In his photography career, Monk stated, he has photographed hundreds of models in the nude or semi-nude with their consent, and have sold photos after the model signs a release with the agreed-upon payment.

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