

CITYDANCE ENSEMBLE CROSSOVERS

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DEFINING “NEXT”

by Paul Gordon Emerson, Artistic Director

What is it to be “next?”

Perhaps my favorite aspect of choosing a concert with a title like *Next* is that there are many subtleties to a word that at first glance appears obvious. That which is next is that which succeeds what is. That’s obvious....Or is it?

Webster’s Dictionary will tell you that the use of *next* is not only in “immediately adjacent,” but also in “it was *next* to impossible to see in the fog.” What’s the point? The point is that seeking out the next generation of great artists is something you have to do to remain relevant and also, like seeing in the fog, something you have to do to catch glimpses and impressions of what is before and beside you. These impressions are emotional, and in that way synonymous with the essence of dance.

Speaking of emotion, let’s talk about choreographer Kate Weare. When was the last time you read one of the top dance critics in America saying, “this is what I’ve been waiting for?” I can’t remember ever reading such a glowing remark. But that’s what Deborah Jowitt of New York’s *Village Voice* said last month of Kate Weare. If the first joy of the *Next* series is launching the search, the rest of that joy is finding someone like Kate Weare. Take it from me – the making of dances is extraordinarily hard. Kate, somehow, makes it seem simple.

Paired with Kate on this program is Juilliard graduate Austin McCormick. While sharing our classification of “who’s next” in dance, their approaches are quite different. Austin is lush and dramatic where Kate is spare. Where he invokes the genius of ancient literature, she employs silence. While there is music of great power underlying his piece *War*, the soul of the work comes in its text – a text which must be performed live, text demanding an actor as skilled as the dancers with whom he shares the stage.

Then there is our own Choreographer-in-Residence Christopher K. Morgan. Christopher has been a journeyman over the years, but with CityDance he has found a home in which to explore his own unique vision. He’s not afraid of text or of theater, of the spare stage or the lush one. He just likes the challenge of bringing you into his world. *Ties that Bind* is an insight into that world, and it’s remarkably complex. Made in Lithuania six years ago, it seems perhaps more fresh today than it did in 2002.

Jason Hartley, whose name is best known to all of us in DC for his work with the Washington Ballet, is the creator of the night’s simplest work, *Nocturne Monologue*. A four minute solo, performed by our own Jason Garcia Ignacio, *Nocturne Monologue* is primal, athletic, and mysterious.

We’re exceptionally proud of the chance to share these four artists with you. They will, I believe, be on the tip of many people’s tongues in the years to come.



ONE-ON-ONE WITH KATE WEARE

Choreographer Kate Weare spent two weeks in the studio with CityDance to rehearse her piece *Drop Down*. To get the inside story on this passionate duet, we asked Ms. Weare to share some thoughts.

CityDance (CD): How and why do human relationships play a major role in and inspire your work?

Kate Weare (KW): Human relationships are a primary source of learning in our lifetimes. We each cultivate a sense of identity but until we come into contact with others and deal with them deeply, we cannot know or understand ourselves. As a physical metaphor for relationships, I love partnering. Dancing is feeling and dancing with another person is an incredible way to sense your own and others' feelings.

CD: Explain *Drop Down*. How would you ask the audience to watch the piece?

KW: *Drop Down* is an attempt to explore some of my own questions about desire, power, and vulnerability between men and women. Because I'm a choreographer, I watch the world through the lens of physicality. I pay close attention to how people negotiate with each other through body language. After studying Argentine tango for a few years, I watched how women handle men through complex body cues regarding receptivity and desire as well as boundaries and threat. I suggest that the audience watch for how defenses come down slowly in *Drop Down*, and game-playing leaks away as heat rises between the partners. *Drop Down* is investigating a paradox—in merging with another we mitigate ourselves—and that this is what we most want and most fear at the same time.

CD: What have you noticed about how different companies and dancers interpret your work?

KW: I base my working process off of the assumption that each dancer is an individual artist with an interesting point of view. Part of the pleasure of working with dancers is witnessing them deepen their roles to the point where they are speaking back to me through their interpretation. Sometimes I'm very surprised, challenged, and delighted by what dancers have to say to me through their sophisticated bodies. I love those intelligent, actively thinking, gutsy ones who can create insight for me into my own work with a unique understanding from inside the movement.

CD: Describe your experience working with CityDance.

KW: CityDance Ensemble has beautifully trained, diverse dancers. My work asks that technique be in service to meaning, rather than exist as an end in itself. I always look to connect technical form with emotion, shape with intention, and dynamic choice with exploration. In my mind dances are there to convey experiences, not to present a flawless picture. I'm interested in dancers as brave, complicated human beings rather than images of perfection—athletes but also artists.

OBSERVING THE TIES THAT BIND

Ties that bind. It's a simple and familiar phrase, yet one that can carry a weight of meaning and connotation. In this concert, Christopher K. Morgan explores this idea with his piece *Ties that Bind*. Using physical and physiological metaphors to tackle the concept of restriction, Morgan's choreography morphs through a series of visual images that parallel the constraints that can be placed on a person's individuality, self-expression, or sense of autonomy.



Originally commissioned by the Lithuanian Dance Company AURA, *Ties that Bind* was first cast on a group of dancers who had all lived through their country's reign of Communism.

"At the time that I was commissioned for this project, it was a piece that I already had on my mind," reflects Morgan. "I was looking to create a dance that metaphorically expressed the frustration I was feeling from restriction

in my own life. So when I got this commission from Lithuania, the idea became a lot more interesting because of the political scenario of the dancers' lives."

Within a Communist regime, these artists had all experienced a time when creative expression and artistic freedom were a narrow path that deviated from mainstream, conventional propaganda.

"One aspect of the dance that definitely came from working and talking with this specific group of dancers was the idea of the unseen observer," notes Morgan. "They talked a lot about their experience under Communist rule feeling like they had eyes on them at all times even though they couldn't necessarily see those eyes. This idea is represented a lot in the first section of the dance, and though it was not something that had been in my original plan for the dance, it developed naturally out of working with these dancers."

After its March 2002 premiere at the University Theater in Kaunas, Lithuania, *Ties that Bind* was featured in the New Baltic Dance Festival in Vilnius, Lithuania. A solo excerpt was chosen as a finalist in the 2002 Dance Under the Stars Choreography Competition in Palm Desert, California, and has been performed in New York, San Francisco, and Munich.

Tonight, Morgan's piece is presented in its entirety before a United States audience for the first time. We invite you—as a welcome and seen observer—to experience *Ties that Bind*.

ORIGINS OF WAR

It is said that a series of scheming affairs between the Gods led to one of the most important events in Greek Mythology: the Trojan War. One of these occasions was the infamous Judgement of Paris—not only a key turning point leading to the war, but also the title of choreographer Austin McCormick's work from which the excerpt *War* makes its DC debut in this evening's concert.

According to McCormick, *War* takes place amidst a landscape somewhere between dream and reality, past and present. At this point in the story, Menelaus, King of Sparta, speaks to the victorious people of Greece after the war between the Greeks and Trojans has ended. As an actor recites these words on stage, the dancers evoke the images Menelaus conjures in his address.

"I hadn't intended the piece to necessarily be a political statement or a declaration about the horror of war," notes McCormick. "But it is pretty incredible that the text used from *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus [in 485 B.C.] is so relevant and poignant in 2008."

McCormick's choreography—in *War* and many of his other pieces—is heavily influenced by Baroque dance, which was the first dance form he studied. Drawn to the complex make-up of Baroque dance, McCormick focuses on blending different disciplines to deliver a well-rounded theatrical experience.

"Baroque operas involved acting, dancing, singing, lavish sets, costumes, and lighting to create a world in which the story lives," explains McCormick. "I strive to make my pieces watchable, entertaining, and meaningful on many levels and using several mediums."

McCormick's Brooklyn-based Company XIV premiered *The Judgement of Paris* last spring in New York and toured it to The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, earning rave reviews on both occasions from critics and audience members alike. CityDance's performance of *War* will be the first time a company other than McCormick's own dances the piece.

"It is always beautiful to see what dancers bring of themselves to choreography and how they make it relevant and meaningful," says McCormick. "I never want to come into a process and simply 're-create' a piece; rather, I want to convey to my collaborators the physical motivations that drive the movement and let the piece be a living breathing thing that can be fully experienced both by performer and audience."

MEET THE ARTISTS OF CITYDANCE



ALICIA ANN CANTERNA

Originally from: Illinois

CityDance company member since: 2006

Noteworthy: Trained at Ballet Center of St. Louis and performed with St. Louis Ballet; graduate of Kirov Academy of Ballet; began BFA in Dance Performance at Shenandoah University and later transferred to University of Maryland - Baltimore County to continue a BFA in Interdisciplinary Studies: Arts and the Media; pursuing Pilates Certificate.

Something you might be if you weren't a dancer: This month I would be a florist because flowers invoke so many emotions and represent so much. Florists are there for the many walks of life that people experience and that must be a rewarding profession.

Favorite CityDance moment: Our trip to St. Mary's College last fall. The road trip was a great time to get to know all the new company members that had joined CityDance and the campus was beautiful. The performance space was very small which presented some funny, memorable moments!

Recurrent dance fantasy: For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to dance professionally. I feel very blessed everyday to be following that dream. It's comforting to know that I'm in an environment that challenges me and allows me to grow as an artist. To my surprise, this doesn't always mean just technically or artistically. More and more I see that it means the importance of being true to who we are as artists and how we can really make a difference in the lives that we touch.

BUILDING DREAMS WITH HOMES

Alicia will travel for two weeks this December to Cameroon to build homes with Habitat for Humanity.

Have you been on a trip like this before?

This will be my first trip with Habitat for Humanity and my first time building a home!

What inspired you to do volunteer work?

[My parents always] stressed the importance of helping others, even when times [may] be tough for yourself. This trip in some ways does not come at the most opportune time and that is why it comes at the best time! When I joined CityDance Ensemble, I was at a crossroads in my life...[it was both] a risk and a challenge for me. CityDance has shown me the importance of reaching out to help others and the rewarding results it can have.

How does this trip fit in with your life and career?

I am very excited about this experience and the opportunity that it creates for me to be a part of a different culture. Habitat for Humanity builds dreams with homes. At CityDance, we build dreams by inspiring others through movement. So, at first glance they may seem different but in actuality we are all working together to create a better world.

WHAT'S NEXT IN DANCE...THEN AND NOW

In a concert dedicated to today's up-and-coming choreographers, it may seem out of place to open the program with the 1942 American masterpiece *Folksay*. While *Folksay* choreographer Sophie Maslow certainly wouldn't be categorized among the emerging artists of this century, there was a time when her work was "what's next" in dance.

As one of today's great dance classics, *Folksay* represents a powerful canon of works that pushed social and political boundaries when it was created in 1942. Lynn Frielinghaus, who spent two weeks with CityDance last spring to reconstruct *Folksay*, was a member of the Sophie Maslow Dance Company and traveled with Maslow before her death in 2006 to restage many of her dances. Here she comments on Maslow, *Folksay*, and how a classic shifts over time.

CityDance (CD): Describe Sophie Maslow.

Lynn Frielinghaus (LF): Sophie Maslow was a person of great integrity and thoughtfulness. Everything she said, did, and created were true to what she believed and felt. I never saw her compromise herself in any way. I so respected her for that. She was a remarkable person in every way and I truly loved her. In fact, I named my first daughter after her.

CD: Are there generational differences in the interpretation and performance of *Folksay*?

LF: When we rehearsed *Folksay* in the 80's, we rehearsed for months with a company familiar with Sophie's style. With CityDance, we worked one month with dancers who were trained in a whole different way of moving. Today we have the use of a dance notation score, which has proved invaluable. Thanks to Sophie and her forward thinking, she had *Folksay* notated in the 90's. Between the score, the videotape, and my "muscle memory" and recall of Sophie's style, the reconstruction went fairly fast.

CD: How has the work changed over time?

LF: I think when *Folksay* was first created in the 40's, the U.S. was very optimistic and proud of itself. The dance really embodies those feelings. I remember when performing *Folksay* in the 80's, I felt a hopefulness and pride in a way of life that was truly American and was mine. I hope the CityDance dancers are experiencing some of that. *Folksay* is also a history lesson for these young dancers, some of whom are unfamiliar with Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, and traditional folk songs.

Folksay was made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts American Masterpieces: Dance initiative, administered by the New England Foundation for the Arts.

CITYDANCE. LET US MOVE YOU.

Watch a performance. Take a class. Or help a child do both. We invite you to discover the power, passion, and purpose of dance.

WHAT IS CITYDANCE?

PROFESSIONAL DANCE COMPANY—CityDance Ensemble attracts world-renowned dancers, choreographers, artists, and educators to create and bring innovative modern dance to Washington, DC. In residence at the Music Center at Strathmore, and one of only a few full-time professional dance companies in the DC metropolitan area, we perform at The Kennedy Center, Harman Center for the Arts, Music Center at Strathmore, across the nation, and around the world.

FREE COMMUNITY PROGRAMS—We ensure that children from DC's most underserved neighborhoods have access to free dance classes and performances. We perform in front of thousands of students each year and our instructors teach in more than 20 schools and community centers. CityDance is committed to building a new generation of dancers and empowering youth through dance.

PROFESSIONAL DANCE SCHOOL & STUDIO SCHOLARSHIPS—We provide high-quality dance training to children and adults. A faculty of highly trained master instructors teach classes in such genres as contemporary, ballet, jazz, hip hop, and African. Our audition-only, pre-professional program, CityDance Select, is unique to the region and prepares talented students ages 13-18 for careers in contemporary dance—whether it be on the concert stage, in commercial work, or as entry to a college dance program. The first Studio Scholarship Fund was launched in June of this year.



CityDance outreach students enjoying a free dance class at the Trinidad Recreation Center.

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