

# CITYDANCE ENSEMBLE CROSSOVERS

A PUBLICATION OF CITYDANCE ENSEMBLE, INC.  
MARCH 2008 • SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS • LANSBURGH THEATRE

**“YET DO THY WORST, OLD TIME; DESPITE THY WRONG,  
MY LOVE SHALL IN MY VERSE EVER LIVE YOUNG.”**

- Shakespeare's Sonnet #19

*By Stephen Fried, Resident Assistant Director, Shakespeare Theatre Company*

When Paul Emerson first approached me about a dance-adaptation of Shakespeare's sonnets, I was at a bit of a loss as to what such a piece should be. The 154 poems that make up the collection generally referred to as Shakespeare's sonnets defy generalization—their themes range from birth to death, from beauty to ugliness, from mature love to adolescent lust. Even the intended recipient of the poems varies, the first 126 being addressed to a young man while Sonnets 127 through 152 are addressed to an infamous 'dark lady.' While scholars have frequently attempted to construct a narrative through-line from the sonnets, this approach seems to disregard the brilliant diversity of the poems' themes.

Of course, Shakespeare didn't write these poems to be performed. In contrast to his plays, the sonnets were private works, first published by Thomas Thorpe (who may or may not have had Shakespeare's authorization to publish them) in 1609, years after it is generally thought that Shakespeare wrote the poems. And also unlike his plays, which, by their very nature as live events, would change from performance to performance based on the nuances of each actor's work,

Shakespeare's sonnets, as written documents, remained constant. The sonnets

themselves attest to their own permanence.

“Who will believe my verse in time to come?”

asks Sonnet 17. “O, if, I say, you look upon this verse,

/When I, perhaps, compounded am with clay,” predicts

Sonnet 71, suggesting the poem's ability to outlive its author.

Yet it is this very attempt at making the evanescent permanent that unites the sonnets as a body of work. Shakespeare repeatedly uses change as a theme of the poems—“every fair from fair sometime declines,” says Sonnet 18—and even when not

explicitly dealing with love's ephemeral nature, Shakespeare's imagery regularly turns to the transitory or fleeting—a sun-lit day that will soon grow cloudy, spring flowers that will soon wilt, rolling waves that will fall back into the sea. Time and death appear frequently in the poems as constant reminders of love's impermanence. And yet against this presence of the inconstant, Shakespeare repeatedly reminds us of each sonnet's ability to record love's fleeting stimulus, and thereby make the momentary eternal.

It is this juxtaposition of the passing with the permanent that the sonnets seem to share with dance. Like the summer days or autumn leaves of Shakespeare's poems, dance, by its very nature, provides a momentary stimulus which then ends as soon as the choreography completes. We experience great dance as if by flashes of lightening, and while these flashes can be recorded in much the same way that Shakespeare records the burning of love's fire, it is in the experience of it, and not in its memory, that the true thrill lies. Choreography exists as a means of making this passing thrill repeatable, much as each sonnet exists as a means of making love's passing joys permanent.

## “AND ALL IN WAR WITH TIME...”

- Shakespeare's Sonnet #15

By Christopher K. Morgan, Rehearsal Director & Choreographer-in-Residence

Two summers ago I was facilitating a group of 10 professional dancers/choreographers in a collaborative, process-oriented project. As we began to explore our individual working processes, I posed a question to the artists that became a topic of discussion throughout our entire project—what were their ideal creative circumstances? Comprised of seven nationalities (and speaking as many languages), it was interesting to hear the common needs: time, space, resources, quiet, calm and more time. The answers seemed simple and universal. But as we dug deeper, we also all recalled times in our lives where inspiration had been found in stressful situations, where the pressure of time could force innovative thinking. The pressure of modern day life requires all of us to work under pressure, to produce work in the absence of those circumstances that are conducive to creativity. But somehow the creation of dance is always slighted by Father Time.

The war with time is a theme within the sonnets, a theme within the work *So Foul a Lie*, and a theme of my experience in creating the work. Though this work has been ruminating in my mind for months, from reading the sonnets, to imagining set and costume pieces, to playing with phrases of movement by myself in the studio, it was a mere five weeks ago when I had the work's first rehearsal. And the stopwatch began ticking... On a daily basis I found myself having to trust the artists with whom I'm working to help me create quickly. Blessed to work with incredibly smart and generous dancers, they often shared their inspirations, their discoveries in the work, their problems and suggested solutions. If I asked them what made sense as a transition into or out of a section of the work, their instinctive answers were often exactly what the flow of the work called for. We would work together to uncover the phrasing of the music. They would work with each other to agree upon unison approaches to movement phrases while I would be working on other sections of the work. As actor Gary Sloan came into our process, he made supportive suggestions about ways to approach the treatment of the text we were incorporating into the piece. In fact, his familiarity with the text empowered my inhibition of working with such grand, well known language. In the war against time, my fellow artists became warriors supporting my creative process.

In creating a work, I often try to allow the work to make itself—that is to come to the process prepared with material, ideas and inspiration, but to allow the space for the creation to follow its own course. This is a process that begs for time to experiment, time to question one's choices, time to try other options. No matter how much time one has, it never seems to be enough. But sometimes the pressure of time allows for a group of artists to collaborate and fill the gaps necessary to move inspiration into realization.

## A SONG FOR A SONNET

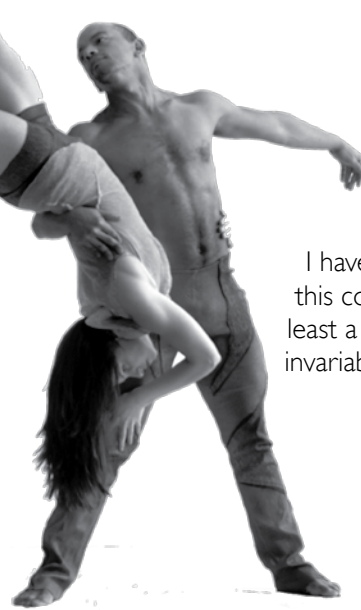
By Matt Jones, Composer

As a songwriter, the prospect of surrounding timeless words with music is both intriguing and daunting—intriguing because the sonnets are astonishingly powerful, evocative words that lend themselves to the creative spirit and daunting for the very same reason. But as with all things Shakespeare, there are the words taken literally, and then there are the moods those words impel upon us.

My task in this weekend's program is two-fold. As a composer in my own right, my thoughts are not about setting a song to the lyrics of the language, but to using my own tools, my own instruments, to create music that is inspired by the words, but beholden none of them in song. In this sense, the process is remarkably similar to the one a choreographer uses. We are both taking inspiration from what is written and read before us, but we are translating them into other languages. One is visual. The other aural. Yet both, fundamentally, are emotional. While there is certainly a literal logic in music, a storyteller's logic, this is more about the highs and the lows to be found in my reading of the words. In this case, the sonnet I chose is #153.

The second facet of this program, for me, is the collaboration in the duet *Falling*, by CityDance Artistic Director Paul Emerson. Paul and

I have worked together in this collaborative way for at least a decade. That process is invariably surprising. In this case, we listened to source tracks, or temp tracks, to seek out a mood for the work. And, as with my own song, the inspiration comes from words that lead to choreography, and then I come in to see



a finished work in need of music. We establish a series of key points in the work and the kinds of instruments which would best represent those moods and key points. For *Falling* we settled on hammer dulcimer, cello, and voice. Not voice to words, but voice as an emotive vehicle, all without lyrics.

It's all based on a simple idea: how do you give voice—differently—to the words of Shakespeare?

## A FUTURE FORESEEN

By Paul Gordon Emerson, Artistic Director

In the *Iliad*, we learn that Cassandra was the child of King Priam of Troy and was considered to be his most beautiful daughter. Cassandra received the power to foretell the future from the god Apollo, who wished to win her affections. Cassandra accepted Apollo as a teacher, but not as a lover. Insulted by this refusal, he punished her by seeing to it that everyone who heard her true and accurate foretelling of future events believed that they were hearing lies. She was both ignored and reviled for her predictions. The wondrous gift of foresight became instead a terrible curse.”  
- Brenda Way, Choreographer of *On A Train Heading South*

In a concert bearing a title which evokes the most romantic and passionate images in the English language, the introduction of a dance, and a subject, which is not simply unromantic but a warning of what lies ahead if we don't act, may seem out of place. But *On A Train Heading South*, Brenda Way's startling, stunning reflection on the source of global warming, is really not so far afield. Her muse may be Homer, and her images contemporary, but like the other works in the evening, the questions are timeless. Who are we and where do we place our passions? To whom do we listen and to what do we attend in matters of both the heart and the future? Shakespeare spends his emotions on the ache of love. Way engages the same ache, but views it from another vantage. Her protagonist is on the other side of the pen, the woman who is adored but who, in refusing to return that adoration in the manner in which it is given, is punished by having her very gift become a curse. Like Shakespeare, Way's Cassandra has a truth

to tell—a truth unheeded. But unlike the anguish and admonition,

the adoration and the celebration of the sonnets, where being unheard is a solitary pain, the fate of us all lies in failing to hear the call of this Cassandra.

As Way notes, NASA tells us that the polar ice cap is melting at the alarming rate of nine percent per decade. At the current rate of retreat, all of the glaciers in Glacier National Park will be gone by 2070. *Nature* magazine observes that nearly 300 species have already begun to shift their habitats and activities in response to rapid climatic change. Many wonder if they can adapt fast enough to survive. The key question is, can humans adjust their thinking and their habits fast enough to survive. Are we willing to read the writing on the wall?



### WANT TO SEE MORE ON THIS SUBJECT?

CityDance continues to tackle global warming and the impact art will have on the issue at our next concert.

#### ***Bold Steps: Warmer***

Saturday, April 12 & Sunday, April 13  
Room 405 • Music Center at Strathmore

**Tickets: \$15**

Strathmore.org • 301.581.5100

## MEET THE ARTISTS OF CITYDANCE ENSEMBLE



### JA'MALIK

**Originally from:** Born in Cleveland, but grew up in New York City

**CityDance company member since:** August 2007

**Noteworthy:** Allistare Butler Fellowship recipient of the Ailey School, Robert Joffrey Fellowship recipient of The Joffrey Ballet School, Alumnus of The Joffrey Ballet/New School University B.F.A. Program.

**Oddest performance experience:** That would be performing *Nutcracker* when I was with Oakland Ballet out in the middle of an outdoor mall in 60 degree cold weather and in the middle of a rain storm. But, the show went on, slips and all...

**What your fellow company members don't know about you:** I sing my heart out (and I mean loud and proud) while walking down the street.

**Something you might be if you weren't a dancer:** It would definitely be something creative. I would either be a fashion designer, chef, or hair stylist.

**Favorite CityDance moment:** There are two. My first would obviously be Paul Emerson accepting my proposal to create my first major work on a professional dance company. The second was meeting Sheron Wray when she came to set *Harmonica Breakdown*. She is just amazing—full of energy, with a passion for dance, and a voice that I just love.

**Recurrent dance fantasy:** I also have two. My first is to be nominated for, and hopefully win, a Princess Grace award for choreography and/or dance performance. The second would be to dance the pas de deux from William Forsythe's *Herman Scherman* with Sylvie Guillem.

# CITYDANCE. LET US MOVE YOU.

CityDance exists so people can learn about and experience great dance.

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**—We create and bring innovative modern dance to Washington, DC. We are one of only two full-time professional dance companies in Washington, attracting world-renowned dancers, choreographers, artists, and educators. The company performs in the Washington, DC region and around the world.

**PROFESSIONAL DANCE SCHOOL**—We provide high quality dance training to children and adults. We offer a diverse curriculum that includes contemporary, ballet, jazz, hip hop, and African dance taught by a faculty of highly trained master instructors. Our pre-professional program is unique to the region and prepares talented students ages 12-19 for careers in contemporary dance, whether it be on the concert stage, in commercial work, or as entry to a college dance program.

**FREE COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**—We work hard to ensure that kids from DC's most underserved neighborhoods have access to free dance classes and performances. Our professional company performs in front of 7,500 students each year and we have more than 35 instructors teaching in 22 schools and community centers. CityDance is building a new generation of dancers and empowering youth through dance.

## SUPPORT CITYDANCE

Only 70% of the work we do is covered by ticket sales and student tuition. Help us:

- Continue to bring some of the world's best dancers, choreographers, and performances to the nation's capital
- Provide scholarships to students who want professional dance training
- Offer dance classes, workshops, camps, and performances to kids from underserved neighborhoods

**SUPPORTING CITYDANCE** is important...and fun. Get involved and **let us move you.**

- Enjoy wine and cheese with a group of your friends or co-workers at a studio rehearsal
- Attend a performance as a VIP. Meet the artists and get the best seats in the house
- Take a backstage tour or... go on tour with us
- Host a private event with CityDance artists at your home, or
- Find the inner-dancer in you and take a class.

Interested in learning more? Contact Marla Moffett, Director of Individual Giving & Major Gifts, at [marla@citydance.net](mailto:marla@citydance.net) or 202.347.3909.

To donate, visit us online at [www.citydance.net](http://www.citydance.net) and click on the "contribute" button. Send a check to: CityDance, 1111 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036

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## THANKS TO OUR *SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS* SUPPORTERS

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