

# CITYDANCE ENSEMBLE CROSSOVERS

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## THE ART OF POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF ART

by Paul Gordon Emerson, CityDance Artistic Director

Where does art intersect with global issues?

Sometimes the answer is easy and obvious. Literature—and words in all forms—have a long and profound legacy of inspiring and codifying change. But the more abstract the art, the more the reach of art as a political mechanism is stretched. There are exceptions of course. *Guernica*, Picasso's angry, anguished protest against the Fascist massacre in that otherwise unknown town during the Spanish Civil War is perhaps the best-known contemporary example. Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* was more metaphorical because it dealt with something historical, not contemporary, but the impact was clear and, regardless of the backstory, remains powerful today. Protest art is consciously (and often self-consciously) overtly political, as is state-sanctioned political art, which the Soviets made into a calling for artists in the 1920s. Sometimes, as with Rodin, the work is made powerful because it is so literal. Sometimes the power lies in heroic abstraction, and sometimes, as with Picasso, it is the stretch, both in form and message, which fuels the fire.

With dance the possibilities are exceptionally rich.

Dance is uniquely positioned to pose questions about the human condition because it is a uniquely human art, requiring no intermediary steps, no paint or pianos, no canvas or carvings, to convey its message. We are the art, and the art is us. Only the human voice, raised in song, compares, requiring no intervention, no innovation through another medium. But, for that very reason—its literalness—dance can struggle as a vehicle. Literal messages risk becoming trite. Deeply abstracted messages, using movement to suggest mood and intent, leave many parts of an audience behind, engaged in that “was that supposed to mean something” questioning.

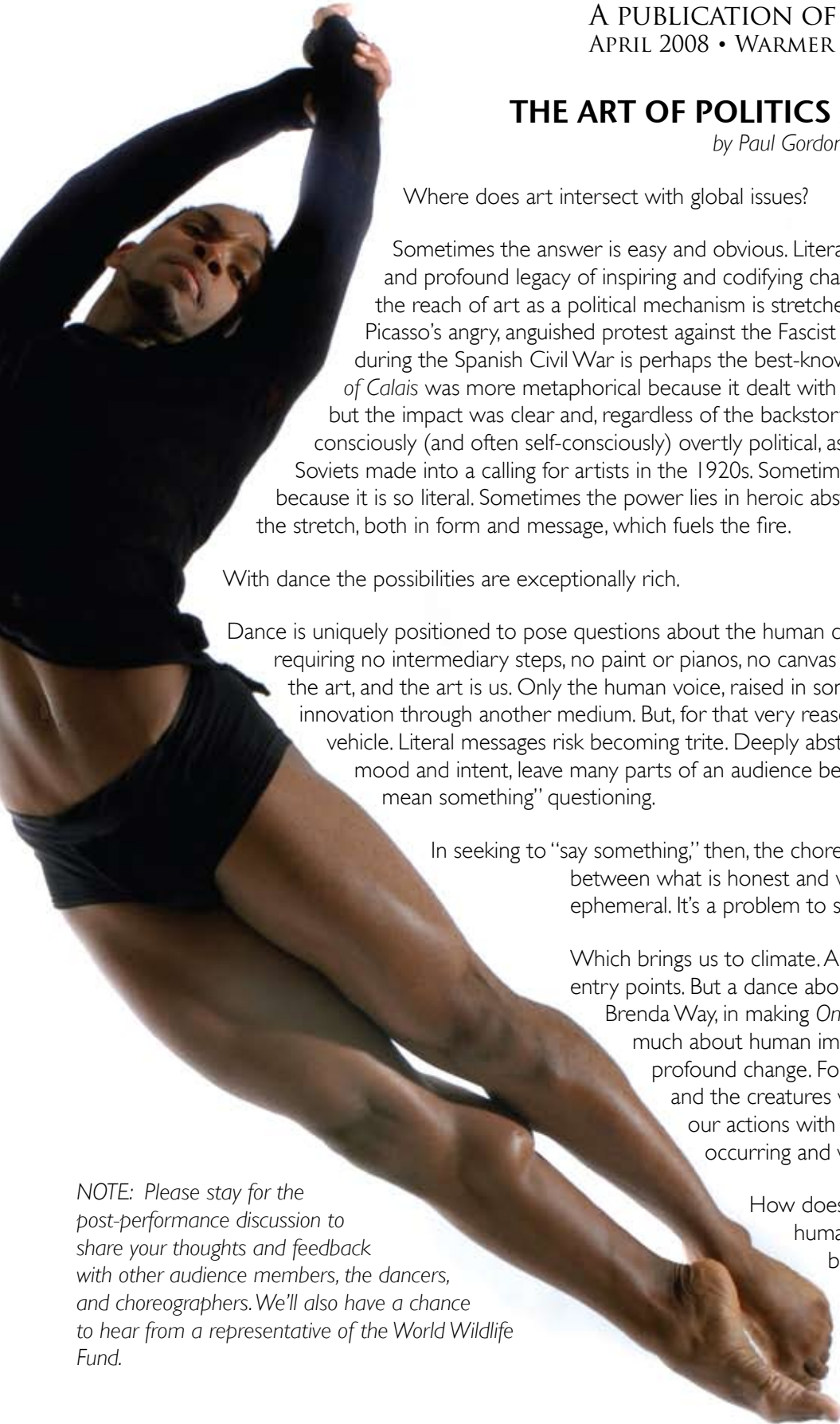
In seeking to “say something,” then, the choreographer and the dancer walk that line between what is honest and what is obvious, what is literal and what is ephemeral. It's a problem to solve in making work.

Which brings us to climate. A dance about social injustice has obvious entry points. But a dance about climate change and habitat loss? For Brenda Way, in making *On a Train Heading South*, the story is very much about human impact and ignorance laced together to create profound change. For Isabel Croxatto, the entry point is nature—and the creatures who face the immediate consequences of our actions with no understanding of how these changes are occurring and why.

How does a dance on that subject arise? And how do humans represent nature in the face of nature being devastated by humans?

Where does our humanity, and “human-ness,” allow us to intersect and interpret nature?

*NOTE: Please stay for the post-performance discussion to share your thoughts and feedback with other audience members, the dancers, and choreographers. We'll also have a chance to hear from a representative of the World Wildlife Fund.*



## THE MANY VOICES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Courtesy of World Wildlife Fund/Lee Poston

Around the world, climate change is threatening not only individual species such as polar bears, tigers, salmon, penguins, and corals, but it is also posing potentially catastrophic and long-term changes to the environment and people's lives around the world.

In addition to rising temperatures, climate change is resulting in sea level rise, increased hurricane intensity, glacier decline, increased drought, spread of disease, shifts in the timing of seasons, increased flooding, changes in freshwater supply, and an increase in extreme weather events.

Burning fossil fuels—coal, oil and gas—releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere where carbon pollution blankets the Earth, traps in heat, and causes global warming. Deforestation and land-use exacerbates this problem. Electricity generation is the biggest single source of man-made carbon dioxide pollution, amounting to 37 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions.

World Wildlife Fund is working to stop climate change by providing cutting-edge science, championing policies to reduce carbon emissions, and mobilizing businesses to drive new and innovative solutions. With a team of dedicated experts working in more than 50 countries, we are focusing our efforts on four areas where we can have the most impact:

- Creating responsible global warming policies
- Working with businesses to reduce carbon dioxide emissions
- Implementing adaptation plans for high risk communities
- Protecting forests that help mitigate climate change

To succeed, World Wildlife Fund needs diverse voices to talk about the climate change threat—not just scientists, politicians, and activists. CityDance's *Warmer* concert is a passionate, inspiring way for the arts community to help spread the message to a new audience. Through choreography, the company can bring a fresh perspective to an often complex and sometimes polarizing issue, conveying the urgency and hope that is desperately needed to tackle one of humanity's biggest challenges.

For more information about World Wildlife Fund's efforts, please go to [www.worldwildlife.org/climate](http://www.worldwildlife.org/climate).



## CITYDANCE ENTERS THE BLOGOSPHERE

Of all the questions asked of CityDance artists and administrators, the one that comes most often is simply "how do you do this?"—meaning how do you make dances. "What gets you started, what happens when you get stuck, where do the ideas come from, and how do you know whether you're on the right track?"

This question of creativity and of the many processes that converge before a dance can appear on stage led to the creation of CityDance Ensemble's first blog: [powerpassionpurpose.blogspot.com](http://powerpassionpurpose.blogspot.com).

The blog invites the artists with whom we work—choreographers, dancers, composers, musicians, costumers, actors, and more—to share their ideas, methods, inspirations, frustrations and, really, anything they want, as a way of getting readers inside the question of creativity.

Because CityDance uses many creative voices, the expression of these processes has taken many forms on the blog. The site has written entries, photo montages, and video clips, the majority of them now focused on the preparation for this weekend's concert.

Ultimately, we hope that this blog will spark conversation and interaction among our readers, audience, and artists.

So take a look. Let us know what you think. Ask us a question. Comment on this concert. Become a part of our creative process.



*Human Forest* (photo by Nicholas Jbara)

A photo from rehearsal of Isabel Croxatto's *Revolution of the Butterflies* that is posted on the CityDance blog

## FROM CHILE TO THE CAPITOL

Chilean choreographer Isabel Croxatto has been in residence with CityDance for the past four weeks to create her piece *Revolution of the Butterflies*. Her work with CityDance was supported by the **Embassy of Chile** and **Ambassador Mariano Fernández**. The following is an interview with Ambassador Fernández about this collaboration.

**CityDance (CD):** Please comment on the importance to you and your country of having Isabel working in the U.S.

**Ambassador Fernández (AF):** It is important to have a Chilean choreographer and dancer working professionally in the United States, especially in a city like Washington, because it is a relevant place for modern dance. Having a Chilean choreographer accepted in the United States is a powerful statement for us.

**CD:** What kind of unique perspective can a Chilean artist bring to the United States?

**AF:** I am not sure if a Chilean choreographer in general can bring something specific, but Isabel Croxatto certainly can. She is bringing a unique perspective that is very interesting for both the U.S. and Chile. Because Chile is located so far south, our environment provides us with a very unique and impressive landscape that causes us to think about global warming in a way that is perhaps different than many other countries.

**CD:** As ambassador, what are your priorities for creating ongoing cultural exchange between Chile and the United States?

**AF:** One of our missions as diplomats is to try to improve cultural exchange between two countries with good relations. America is

a very powerful country with a strong democracy and economy, so it is especially important to improve cultural exchange in both directions. Just as we have a Chilean choreographer working here in Washington, we would love to have CityDance work in Chile.

**CD:** What do you hope that the audience might take away from seeing Isabel's piece?

**AF:** On a personal level, I feel that Isabel's piece is impressive in both technique and expression. It is very moving, from the moment it starts to the moment it ends. You don't see that everyday, but a piece this captivating is rare and unforgettable.

**CD:** Do you have any comments on the subject of Isabel's piece? How is global warming being addressed Chile?

**AF:** In many ways, Chile is not the greatest producer of global warming, yet it is very strongly affected by it. In the last few years, we have seen drastic effects on our agriculture and energy. But, Chile has developed a wide program to face this kind of challenge by saving energy and looking for new and more efficient sources of energy.



*Revolution of the Butterflies*  
(photo by Paul Gordon Emerson)

A photo from the April 3 preview performance at the residence of Ambassador Mariano Fernández

## MEET THE ARTISTS OF CITYDANCE ENSEMBLE



### DELPHINA PARENTI

**Originally from:** North Carolina

**CityDance company member since:** July 31, 2007

**Noteworthy:** B.F.A. from The Juilliard School; danced with Public Dance Theater and involved with Artreach - an outreach organization designed to bring arts to minorities and people in need; also a certified yoga instructor.

**Oddest performing experience:** Performing at Bloomingdale's on the marble floor amidst racks of clothing, with about 12 people watching while they shopped on a Wednesday night. We got to play with the choreography a bit—it was fun and unforgettable.

**Something you might be if you weren't a dancer:** It's so hard to narrow down. . .drummer/singer, therapist, eastern religions scholar, naturopath, animal rights activist.

**Something my fellow company members don't know about me:** I dance in my sleep (according to my boyfriend!)

**Recurrent dance fantasy:** To dance in Germany for Pina Bausch and/or William Forsythe. I would pretty much die if that happened!

# 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. As one of only two full-time professional dance companies in Washington, we attract world-renowned dancers, choreographers, artists, and educators. Our company performs in the Washington, DC region and around the world.

**PROFESSIONAL DANCE SCHOOL**—We provide high-quality dance training to children and adults. With a diverse curriculum, our faculty of highly trained master instructors teach classes in such genres as contemporary, ballet, jazz, hip hop, and African. 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 Moffet, 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.

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**WWW.CITYDANCE.NET**