



Wilderness Newsletter vol 5

What's new...

Giving

2007 was a record setting year. We surpassed our 2006 donation record, choreographed our first opera and performed further from Minneapolis than we ever have before.

Tour

This summer we took our newly created work Orpheus and Euridice on tour. On July 18th, with the maximum limit of luggage, we climbed onboard a plane to the big island of Hawaii. Our performance was commissioned by the Hawaii Performing Arts Festival (HPAF), a three week festival of opera held yearly on the big island. We spent a week rehearsing with four world-class musicians and the renowned composer Ricky Ian Gordon. Genette Freeman, the executive director of HPAF wanted to share the experience with our newsletter recipients. Here is her letter.

If you're involved in the performing arts, you know about applause. Sometimes it's tepid and tentative, obligatory. Sometimes the sound of hands clapping comes bursting from the audience in a tumultuous wave, punctuated by whoops and hollers.

After Jesse and Amber performed their originally choreographed version of Ricky Ian Gordon's "Orpheus and Euridice", I heard the composer, who was sitting next to me, whisper "My God!" I heard this because there was no sound emanating at all from the audience for many long seconds, until shortly thereafter I began to hear sniffing and muffled sobbing. Then the applause came from an audience profoundly moved, for a long time, long enough for the performers to take several bows and receive their standing ovations.

Yes, it's a sad piece. One weeping festival vocal student from Malibu came over to just stand by the composer, indicating she was unable to speak. The next morning I cornered a faculty member and asked why she hadn't attended last night's performance. "Oh, but I did. When it was over, I

had to just leave. I didn't want to talk to anyone or see anyone."

I, for one, won't forget Jesse Walker and Amber Ellison's choreography...the sweet synchronicity of the young lovers, and then Orpheus caressing the dying hand of Euridice, almost like a beast. It was a singular moment in time; that, like all great art, cannot be duplicated but will live in the memory of everyone who saw it. We will not forget it.

-Genette Freeman

Feedback

As artists we continually study how our work affects our audience. Most often in dance this feedback is received at the end of a long process and can't be applied until you begin your next project. With Orpheus and Euridice we decided to take another approach.

In 2006, we learned a critical response technique from Miriam Must and Steve Busa from the Red Eye Theater. In this technique, feedback is provided as answers to very prescribed questions posed by a mediator.

In early July, we held a critical response feedback session for Orpheus and Euridice. We performed several sections and then listened as our audience spoke to us about what they saw, what they thought it meant and what they didn't understand. The beauty of this method is that it provides us with the time to absorb the feedback that we feel is applicable and leave behind the feedback that isn't quite right. We applied the applicable feedback we received before we performed in Hawaii.

We plan to show the complete choreography of Orpheus and Euridice, sadly without live music, in February of 2008. It will be an informal open rehearsal. Date and time to be announced soon.

Video Projects

From November 1st through December 31st, Weaving My Story, an exhibit created by Amber Ellison Walker, Joan Jarvis Ellison, and Halima Ali can be seen at the East Lake Library in Minneapolis. This exhibit tells the story of Halima Ali, a Somali refugee living in small town America. The video that accompanies this exhibit can be seen at www.wildernessdance.org/Halima.mov

Amber's dance for camera UP will be showcased on the Minneapolis PBS station as part of the annual MNTV series. This series highlights film and video created by local artists, in 2005 Amber's dance of camera Cry Out was a part of this series. UP will be broadcast December 30th -10PM -Channel 2 and January 5th -10PM -Channel 17. Since this is only available to Minneapolis residents, we are having a New Year's Eve Party on December 30th to watch the broadcast. More details to come via email.

A Different Kind of Performance

August 25th 2007 Jesse and Amber had a small wedding ceremony at Amber's parents farm in northern Minnesota. The weather was perfect and all requisite wedding fiascos were embraced with laughter and cooperation. Our first dance was not quite as polished as we had hoped. Amber's floor-length wedding dress proved to be more cumbersome and much longer than her normal dancing clothes, causing for much giggling and looking at the floor.



Photo by V. Paul Virtucio

Dancing on the Edge: The Story Continues

(the first few centuries of this brief history can be found in our Spring 2007 newsletter)

In the late 1800's, several choreographers found even the edge of classical ballet too restrictive, or downright destructive of dance. Loïe Fuller danced in bare feet. Her choreography focused on individual dancers. Isadora Duncan believed that dance was an art and should reflect the highest point the spirit of mankind has reached. She completely remade the dance; changed the rigid structure of the steps, the rigid toe shoes, and the stylized costumes, but most importantly, she gave the choreographer and the dancer permission to instill the dance with emotion, unlike traditional ballet in which emotion was restricted to a few stylized gestures.

Other choreographers followed Duncan's lead. Martha Graham, who performed what was perhaps the first American modern dance in 1926, felt that ballet training was inadequate. She stressed movement from the center of the torso and introduced spontaneity to a dancer's technique. This was entirely foreign to the structured dances of ballet which were passed unchanged from one generation of dancer to the next.

Although George Balanchine's dancers used classical technique, he believed that the music was more important than technique. In the same decades, Merce Cunningham went to the opposite extreme and choreographed dances with no music. His intention was to display human movements, not necessarily traditional dance movements, in space and time.

Sometimes you can see reflections of historic choreographers in the work of Wilderness Dance. In *Channeling*, produced in 2005, neither Amber nor Jesse appear to use traditional dance movements. However, their performance is undoubtedly a modern dance duet.

Modern dance grew out of a passion for creativity, found forms of music better suited to modern concerns, and created its own movement vocabulary. In spite of this, inevitably, a new generation of choreographers continues to search for the edge of modern dance. -Joan Jarvis Ellison

See our 2008 spring newsletter for the riveting third and final installment of *Dancing on the Edge*, in which John Cage plays 5 minutes of silence and *Happenings* occur.

Channeling



Photo by Jim Christianson