

Themes Drive Rebecca Kelly Ballet

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"The world we live in is always on my mind, and that's what generates my choreography," says Rebecca Kelly, whose 27-year old contemporary ballet company presented its theme driven spring performances April 24-26. "But my words are usually directed to the dancers to encourage them to go deep to understand the motivation behind the piece, to find something that rings true to them, or to find what they have to bring to the idea." Rebecca Kelly Ballet distinguishes itself with a force of culturally significant issues behind the dancing. "Or just to help them be courageous," she adds, "because it takes great courage to be a dancer."

This courage was explored in the first ballet on the program at John Jay College: the premiere of "Writing in Water." A metaphor for the ephemeral nature of dance, the work features 5 dancers intertwining in various combinations and phrases to music from Beethoven's "Grosse Fugue," which was composed after he became completely deaf. The concept motivating the piece is that a performance is a moment in time you can never get back.



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From a dancer's perspective, it's like trying to write in water - fleeting, transient, and gone almost quicker than it came. That feeling when you surface into the spotlight, out of the shadows of the darkness drowning you and into a state where no thought occurs but being alive – it can never be felt the same again. And if someone missed seeing you dance, that moment can never be returned. You are back in the endless stream of dancers in New York City wading desperately through to reach your dreams, resisting the tide of failure and rarely coming up for air.

The cast members have all been there themselves and thus bring a personal connection to the theme. During the rehearsal process there was much emphasis on the relationships between them and the space onstage. Besides fluid dancing this piece resonated with observing dancers (students and professionals were offered a ticket discount).

Passionate about issues outside the world of dance, Kelly also presented a heart rending work relating to the Iraq War, called "Long Time Passing." Exhibiting particular cultural and emotional depth today, it is based on a series of letters received from Iraq from First Lieutenant Nolan Albarelli, brother of company dancer Kate Albarelli. "It was his words and his eyes, his bravery and despair, and his humanity that he was able to share with me that caused this dance to come into being," says Kelly, "back here, safely in the U.S." His letters were read on NPR July 4th, 2007 after she sent them to Senior News Analyst Daniel Schorr.



Long Time Passing, "Photo courtesy of Adrian Buckmaster

The dancers were frightened that Albarelli, as a mine sweeper, might not make it home, and "Long Time Passing" shows their concern for what he and the soldiers and their families endure. Three couples embody the despair of separation when the men are notified that they will be sent to war, as Albarelli was. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal and distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as Platoon Leader, Alpha Company, 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Forward Operating Base Warrior, Iraq, from August 2, 2006 to September 31, 2007 during "Operation Iraqi Freedom." The company reached out to all Veterans organizations to offer half price tickets for the performances, and Albarelli was present on opening night, April 24.

The ideas behind Ms. Kelly's choreography are what she stresses most, and it is quite obvious from her extensive repertoire that environmental concerns are also at the top of her agenda. Timed for recognition of Earth Week, the season's program included two ballets reflecting earthly themes. In addition, author and environmentalist Bill McKibben served as Honorary Chair of the company's gala on opening night. McKibben is a forerunner in aiding the environment, with books including, "Fight Global Warming Now" (2007), "The End of Nature" (2006), and most recently "Deep Economy."

His involvement coincided with the premiere of Kelly's "Adirondack Elemental," a ballet in three sections. "Water" is a flowing duet for Mona Afable and Therese Wendler. "Earth" features the strength and groundedness of Uthman Ebrahim and Royce Zackery. "Air" is a breathy pas de

deux highlighting dancers Emily Sorelle and Raul Peinado. Together the segments, through meaningful movement, bring awareness to nature's beauty, particularly for the Adirondack



Mountain region where the company has close connections. "Tear of the Clouds," Kelly's first environmental ballet choreographed in 1989 returned to complete the 2008 program, depicting the slow death of a forest from acid rain.

The program was ambitious in its tackling of such a range of hot topics, but Kelly's enthusiasm and her unique dancers made for an evening of deep thought within dance, an effective medium for expression of such important themes.

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