

DHDC 2009 NEWSLETTER

The goals of the DHDC are: a) to challenge assumptions which limit how we identify the physical body in time and space, through a revision of prevailing historical traditions and a critique of our current understanding of form, flow, and beauty, in dance; b) to expand the cultural concept of 'dancer' by redefining his/her role as a site for inquiry; and, c) to expand notions of choreography to include the process through which a choreographer transmits a dance to a performer, accounting for the many and often discontinuous threads, visible and invisible, that effect the presence and immediacy of the dancer. **For more information about the DHDC check www.deborahhay.com**



TEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

By Rino Pizzi

2008 marked the tenth anniversary of the Solo Performance Commissioning Project, a 10-day residence where 20 performers of diverse backgrounds learn a new solo dance choreographed by Deborah Hay. The SPCP's format is intended to be quite daring, and its impact on the international dance community and on the arts in general has yet to be fully assessed and understood. The project has developed in parallel with the innovative choreographic challenges Hay has set for herself in both her solo and ensemble choreography, and its materials have also been a rich resource for her writing and dancing.

Her recent sextet, *If I Sing to You (2008)*, includes the most experimental aspects of the SPCP work thus far, and foreshadows new developments in Hay's choreographic imagination. Originally commissioned by the Frankfurt-based Forsythe Company, *If I Sing to You* was presented at dance festivals throughout Europe and in Australia. It was co-produced by the Maggie Allesee Center for Choreography in Florida, Zodiac Center for New Dance in Helsinki, Howard Gillman Foundation in New York—all in conjunction with the Deborah Hay Dance Company, and with additional support from the Baryshnikov Dance Foundation. **In November 2009 *If I Sing to You* will premiere in the USA at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York City as part of Performa 09, the third biennial of new visual art performance.**

The SPCP was conceived in 1997 on Whidbey Island, in Puget Sound, an hour outside of Seattle. The idea emerged from Hay's growing interest in the solo format, which was already defining her most daring experimental work. The possibilities of a commissioning project were discussed and shaped with help from Hay's friend, Kris Wheeler and by August 1998, The SPCP was up and running at the Whidbey Island Center for the Arts, where it was hosted for five years.

The most relevant aspect of the SPCP is that the participants do not learn the solo as a scripted complete choreography. Hay insists on a disciplined understanding of the choreographic design, but she also requires participants to re-invent the dancing through their own daily practice. This leads to conscious modifications that serve the interest and experience of each artist in the adaptation process. Thus, key aspects of the dance develop multiple parallel lives in the various adaptations. Even the name of the dance changes for each participant's solo. Yet Hay clearly remains the sole author of the choreography. In the midst of this balance of mastery and collective participation, she calls her version of the dance "her own adaptation," refusing to establish her performance as the model or primary reference for the others, insisting that an adaptation is neither a variation nor an interpretation. In Hay's terms, a variation would be the retelling of an established, immutable and complete model, and an interpretation would be a deeper rethinking of the same model.

Central to and defining of the dances made for the Whidbey Island SPCP was Hay's own daily approach to the work—her practice. Practice, a term she has used for at least 30 years, defines her creative approach

Continued inside

Dancers from *If I Sing to You*.
(l to r) Michelle Boulé, Amelia
Reeber, Vera Veranlinna,
Juliette Mapp, Jeanine Durning,
Catherine Legrand (not pictured)



In Memory

Deborah Hay and the Deborah Hay Dance Company have recently lost two unforgettable friends and exceptional supporters. **Karen Kuykendall** passed away in 2007, and **John Slatin** in 2008. We deeply miss them.

Academic Recognition

On October 2, 2009, Deborah will be conferred an **Honorary Degree of Doctor of Dance** by the Theater Academy in Helsinki. In the announcement, the institution offered the degree to Deborah “in recognition the great services [she] has rendered to the Finnish dance field and education.”

Thank you

Thank you to **Mark Holzbach**, for his knowledge and generosity in solving seemingly impossible computer problems, and more; **Joanne Trubitt** for newsletter layout and design; **Sumi Komo** for studio use for solo work; **Diana Prechter**, for help with the DHDC blog and website; **Kent Cole**, for completing the monumental project of converting into digital format the entire DHDC audiovisual library for Deborah’s archive at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts; **Beverly Bajema** and **Will Dibrell** for their heartfelt generosity; and **Grace Mi-He Lee** for stepping in at the last moment as project manager for *If I Sing to You*.

while choreographing and performing a solo, and includes the process by which other dancers realize their adaptations. Abandoning conscious choices; leaving room for the most unmediated statements coming from the body; dismantling clusters of movements and patterns of cause and effect; refusing to let the body conform to recognizable meanings and closure—this incessant trickery that Hay prescribed to her body in the process of creating her dances was, quite surprisingly, paralleled by an increasingly expanding writing process, which has become central to her work in more recent years.

In the early SPCP solos, Hay used minimal material to transmit the dance to participants. Consistent with her teaching methods at the time, Hay based the choreography on a question about possibilities that required no solutions. For the 1998 solo, *The Other Side of O*, the question was: “What if now is here is harmony?”—a question that challenges presence itself by collapsing the distinction of time and space as the only possible source of harmony.

The following solos *Fire* (1999), *Boom Boom Boom* (2000), *Music* (2001), and *O Beautiful* (2002) saw Hay’s work move towards an increasingly distilled and minimal aesthetic model. Her rarefied gestures defined a unique form of personal classicism, and provided material that would later appear in her group dances. Her experiments with vocalization became more relevant and words and phrases less and less recognizable, rising to the role of a further inscription of space - rather than a commentary or punctuation for movement.

Fire, the 1999 SPCP dance, sparked two new developments in Hay’s career and experimental work. First, while performing her own adaptation of *Fire* back to back with the adaptation of SPCP alumna Ros Warby (at Danspace, New York City, in 2000), Hay recognized new possibilities of working with trained dancers who were also choreographers. Thus the quartet *The Match*, premiered, also at Danspace, in 2004.

The second was the beginning of her collaboration with Mikhail Baryshnikov. When Baryshnikov and David Gordon launched the *Past/Forward Project*, Baryshnikov saw Hay perform *Fire* at his White Oak studio retreat, and commissioned her first ensemble dance for a professional dance company, the White Oak Dance Project, titled *Whizz* (2001).

In 2004 the SPCP relocated to Findhorn, Scotland, a small community similar to Whidbey Island, but closer to the growing number of European dancers interested in Hay’s work. London-based dancer, teacher, presenter, and curator Gill Clarke administers the Findhorn SPCP through her organization Independent Dance, with help from Karl Jay Lewin of Bodysurf Scotland.

The Findhorn SPCP’s five solos to date, *The Ridge* (2004), *Room* (2005), *News* (2006), *The Runner* (2007), and *I’ll Crane for You* (2008), have inspired numerous commissions for ensemble projects. *Room* (2005) was the forerunner for the productions of “*O,O*” (2006) in New York with Jeanine Durning, Neil Greenberg, Miguel Gutierrez, Juliette Mapp, and Vicki Shick and the French production of “*O,O*” (2006), with Nuno Bizarro, Corinne Garcia, Emmanuelle Huynh, Jennifer Lacey, Catherine Legrand, Laurent Pichaud, and Sylvain Prunenec. *The Runner* had two incarnations in the commissions of *Grope, Find It, and Pull It Out* (2008), a quartet created for British dancer/choreographers Andrea Buckley, Rachel Kirche, Jane Mason, and Fiona Millward, and a duet, *Found Music* (2008), performed by Mike Barber and Cydney Wilkes, in Marfa, TX and Portland, OR. All the dancers in *Grope, Find It, and Pull It Out* and *Found Music* had learned *The Runner* in the 2007 SPCP. *I’ll Crane for You* (2008) was the foundation for an ensemble work, *Up Until Now*, for eleven dancers, commissioned and presented by the Toronto Dance Theater in January 2009.

November 2009, Performa will present the USA premiere of *If I Sing To You* at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York City as part of Performa 09, the third biennial of new visual art performance.

March 2010, Deborah will perform a new solo, produced by Danspace, and presented at St. Mark’s Church-in-the-Bowery, a familiar venue for Hay’s work of the last decade. She will be collaborating once again with lighting director, Jennifer Tipton.

As her solos intersected with a growing number of group performances, Hay's writing took a new turn, touching on poetic language and literary imagination. Her dance scores contain more first person narration, as well as detailed descriptive imagery. They assume a unique role in her choreographic process, defining the dance in a broad visual and emotional landscape, yet rarely translating into conventional stage directions. The richness of her writing acquires an aesthetic value *per se*, due to its relative autonomy from the performance itself. In fact, if the score is not the script for the performance, and if each performance is an adaptation of the original practice/choreographic design, then the score itself has an identity of its own—just like many classic plays have a literary value that is independent from their staging. Whereas the premises for her solos from 1998 through 2003 were based on a direct confrontation with the learned and internalized vocabulary of movement that is pervasively shared in our culture—be it in our personal life or in imaginable dance practices—her writing now allows the dancers to engage with a more expansive poetic ground. Dancers meet in a place where the evocative power of language keeps playing with the appearance of descriptive directness, yet it hardly provides anything that would resemble conventional movement notation.

The making of *If I Sing to You* (2008) grew out of Hay's encounter with William Forsythe. After attending a performance of *The Match* in 2005, Forsythe, who had never seen Hay's choreography, was struck by the power of her work on his attention. He was inspired to commission and then produce *If I Sing to You*, which premiered in Dresden in 2008. The performers in *If I Sing to You* are all experienced dancers who had either participated in prior SPCP projects, like Michelle Boulé, Catherine Legrand, Amelia Reeber, and Vera Veranlinna, or they appeared in recent ensemble pieces influenced by SPCP, like Jeanine Durning, Juliette Mapp, Chrysa Parkinson. One of the many choreographic achievements of *If I Sing to You* is how the interaction of its performers consistently provides an ongoing engagement with the futility of description, and relates directly to the unlearning of the body's choreographed behavior that Hay has explored and keeps exploring in her investigation of the solo form. This results in a sort of aesthetic "suspension of disbelief," which is in fact the true promise of Hay's art; how a dance can become a seamless event that arises from the gaps between multiple choreographic spaces, and where writing, voice, and movement keep surfacing to lead our consciousness through an authentic experience of time.

Individual Patrons for *If I Sing To You*

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DEAR FRIENDS, the DHDC wishes to thank you for your continuous and generous support. 2007 and 2008 were two wonderful years, and the upcoming DHDC 2009-10 Season has many exciting new projects. Please return this after checking the appropriate box.

YES

- ☐ Thank you Deborah for the gift of your singing! I want to be a patron!
- ☐ The only social network I really like is your stage and your audience. I want to support your work!
- ☐ Your dances make me feel my body and I want to contribute!
- ☐ Your work keeps me awake! I want to see more!

NO

- ☐ I'm on the phone...
- ☐ I'm on the phone, checking my facebook and twitter accounts!
- ☐ I'm on the phone, writing on my facebook wall and driving to a meeting.
- ☐ If you sing to me I might fall asleep.

Name _____

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Contributions to the Deborah Hay Dance Company are tax-deductible. Please mail your check to the DHDC, 1703 Alta Vista Avenue, Austin TX 78704.

DHDC

1703 Alta Vista Avenue
Austin, Texas 78704

Return Service Requested

DHDC 2009-2010 itinerary

JUNE 22 – JULY 3, 2009

Stockholm, Sweden

Solo Performance Project

contact: Malin Lundstedt / Malin.Lundstedt@dansenshus.se

JULY 12 - 24, 2009

assisted by Scott Heron

California State Univ SummerArts 09

link to <http://www.csusummerarts.org>

JULY 15, 2009 / 8 PM

Performance: A Lecture on the Performance of Beauty

link to <http://www.csusummerarts.org>

contact: Karen Schaffman at kschaffm@csusm.edu

AUGUST 26 – SEPT 5, 2009

Findhorn, Scotland

Solo Performance Commissioning Project

contact: Gill Clarke at gclarke@easynet.co.uk

or, Fiona Millward / fiona@independentdance.co.uk

SEPT 7 - 12, 2009

London's Independent Dance presents Deborah Hay's

choreography workshop / 10 AM to 4 PM

and,

SEPT 14 - 18, 2009

practicing performance workshop / 10 AM - noon

contact: info@independentdance.co.uk or 020 7091 9650

details at www.independentdance.co.uk

SEPTEMBER 21 - OCTOBER 1, 2009

University for the Performing Arts, Finland

Workshops w/ Theater Academy, Dance Dept / MA Students

contact: Jan-Peter Kaiku at jpkaiku@teak.fi, <http://www.teak.fi>

NOV 10-12, 2009 (TBC)

Performance: If I Sing To You

The Baryshnikov Arts Center

450 West 37th Street, New York NY

2010

JANUARY 25 – FEB 12, 2010

School for New Dance Development/Amsterdam, Netherlands

Commission: for SNDO / entire school (40)

contact: g.smeets@ahk.nl

MARCH 10 – 19, 2010

Bundanon Artists Retreat, NSW, AUSTRALIA

Solo Performance Project

Co-presenters: Dancehouse/Melbourne, Critical Path/Sydney,

STRUTdance/Perth

contact: David Tyndall at david@dancehouse.com.au

MARCH 25 – 27, 2010

Danspace Project presents

Solo Performance / Deborah Hay /and lighting Jennifer Tipton

St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, NYC

APRIL 26 – 30, 2010

Coaching ROSAS / Brussels, Belgium

JULY/AUGUST, 2010

Commission: for 7 Finnish dancer/choreographers

Joona Halonen, Satu Halttunen, Anne Hiekkaranta,

Jyrki Karttunen, Jenni-Elina Lehto, Vera Nevanlinna,

Ville Oinonen

Co-presenters: Zodiak Center for New Dance and

Karttunen Kollektiv

contact: outi.jarvinen@zodiak.fi

AUGUST 25 THROUGH SEPT 3, 2010

Findhorn, Scotland

Solo Performance Commissioning Project

contact: Gill Clarke at gclarke@easynet.co.uk

or, Fiona Millward, fiona@independentdance.co.uk