Here They Come . . .

The 2015–16 FCDD repertory project was a restaging of Megawatt by Pilobolus Dance Theater, directed by Mount Holyoke College Professor of Dance Charles Flachs. Pilobolus was founded in the 1970s by a handful of Dartmouth College students who had no formal dance training and no interest in playing by technical rules. Pilobolus is named after a fungus—an ever-changing, shifting, symbiotically positive process that brings about life, collaboration and community response.

When I was chosen to be a part of the Pilobolus Megawatt cast, I was honored, thrilled and completely unaware of the epic journey that lay ahead. My body was about to be pushed to its physical limit as I started to learn the language of Megawatt: propelling myself across the floor without using my limbs; lifting, rolling and spinning other dancers . . . flopping in the air like a healthy trout! With a safe supportive space in which to explore, one can arrive at the most valuable lessons.

As the summer heat slipped away, 14 FCDD dancers were hard at work “frying.” To fry correctly, one must lie on one’s back and begin to shake incessantly, moving across the stage like it is electrically charged and you are a zombie worm—sounds simple, right? Each day of rehearsal, it felt as if I were at the top of an efficient, hilarious and extremely exhausting roller coaster and I couldn’t wait for the actual drop-off. After each day of the intensive, we (slowly) walked home, daydreaming of Tiger Balm and icy Jacuzzis.

Megawatt is essentially about the constant “plug-in” Americans have created as our society’s glue. Everyone is on their smartphone, their computer, their Bluetooth, Facebook. It seems like more people stare at screens than at the stars these days. The dance takes you into an electric, simulated world, where people are no longer of human form but instead reflect this technologically obsessed culture. Set to Primus and Radiohead, the music helped connect the cast to an invisible electricity surging between each of us. Pilobolus made us feel like we had the authority to dance this piece as well as the freedom to create new material to make it our own. I am so thankful for my gentle, conscious cast of fellow “Megawatters.” I am amazed at their resilience, and I am proud to share the secret world of “windshield wipers,” “doodahs,” “twizzles,” “endless falls,” and “unching.”

—Zazie Tobey (MHC ’16)
THE ELLINGTON NUTCRACKER

University Dancers celebrated its 45th anniversary this year. To honor the milestone, 10 alumni were invited back to choreograph sections of The Nutcracker as arranged by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. The UMass Jazz Ensemble provided live accompaniment. Dancer Erica Weiss (UM ’18) wrote this about the event:

“Working on the Ellington Nutcracker was an artistic process unlike any other I have experienced. After only two or three rehearsals per choreographer, it was up to us to retain all the idiosyncrasies of the movement and continuously bring it to life in rehearsals. We had to depend on our initial rehearsal videos and our fellow performers’ memories, and that teamwork really brought our cast together.”

Every choreographer had a distinct style. Switching from the BoSoma Company’s sassy and flirt-y athleticism to Leah Moriarty’s more gestural and quirky romp through jazz music was not an easy task. To unite the dramatically different styles of the pieces was challenging, but our work on transitions with our rehearsal director, UMass Assistant Professor of Dance Paul Dennis, made the piece coherent.

“I’m glad I got to be a part of this project and to share some of the dance artists who have graduated from UMass Dance. Before and after rehearsals with the alumni, we would have little chats about how they found their place in the dance world, and it gave me more faith in my ability to find my own place when I graduate in two years. I enjoyed being a part of this celebration of the UMass Dance community, past, present and future.”

Continued on page 3

I CAPULETI E I MONTECCHI AT AMHERST COLLEGE

Israeli choreographer Idan Cohen, who first came to Amherst College as a Copeland Fellow in 2012–13, returned as a visiting artist-in-residence during 2015–16. Cohen’s year at Amherst College culminated in the production of his dance opera, I Capuleti e i Montecchi (The Capulets and The Montagues), presented by Amherst College’s Theater and Dance Department in collaboration with the Idan Cohen Dance Company. Cohen brought 11 members of his dance company and two of Israel’s most revered opera singers, Karin Shifrin and Anastasia Klevan, to Amherst to perform alongside five College dancers in the opera. One of those dancers was Ellen Oliver (HC ’16), who had this to say about her experience:

“I Capuleti e i Montecchi was one of the largest and most collaborative productions I have ever been a part of. The opera itself was thought-provoking and intriguing, as both opera singers and dancers simultaneously communicated their story through their own media. It invited the audience to witness not only a love story, but also a deeply political story of two families caught between war and borders.

The first time we rehearsed with the orchestra, the world of Romeo and Juliet came to life. I will never forget the magic of performing with a live orchestra and professional opera singers. The interaction between the sounds and the dancing reached a new level—the two felt inseparable. Idan Cohen was a joy to work with. I am so thankful for the opportunity to have worked with him for the entire spring semester. He always had insightful feedback and suggestions for improvement. This workshop was an artistic collaboration unlike any other I have experienced. After only two or three rehearsals per choreographer, it was up to us to retain all the idiosyncrasies of the movement and continuously bring it to life in rehearsals. We had to depend on our initial rehearsal videos and our fellow performers’ memories, and that teamwork really brought our cast together.”

In the end, I learned about new dance techniques, partnering material, and bel canto history and mythology, while working with incredible professional dancers. I am still amazed by the amount of dedication it takes to produce a full-length dance opera. I was challenged as a dancer, artist and thinker. I will never forget the energy of the live music, the excitement of the cast and the professionalism of the production.”

Continued on page 3
Master Classes and Workshops

In September, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan made a rare and special trip to our area to perform one of Artistic Director Lin Hwai-min’s masterworks, Rice, at the UMass Fine Arts Center. While the company was here, Five College dancers had an opportunity to take master classes with them at both Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges.

Innovative duo Bridgman | Packer Dance brought its fascinating Truck to the Pioneer Valley in early October. Truck is performed inside a 17-foot U-Haul box truck, with the audience viewing from the outside, and creates a reimagined space that dynamically combines choreography, video, sound design and music. The company staged three local performances in nontraditional public spaces. Art Bridgman and Myrna Packer also found time to teach a dance and video workshop at Hampshire College and a partnering workshop at Amherst College.

NYC-based Doug Varone and Dancers visited Amherst in October to perform at the UMass Fine Arts Center. Teach a master class for Five College dancers at UMass and perform Stripped in the Main Studio Theater at Hampshire College. With Stripped, Doug Varone offered an intimate glimpse into the construction of his works. Acting as emcee under simple work lighting, with his dancers dressed only in rehearsal clothes, Varone offered a behind-the-scenes look into how his dance is created, finishing with “stripped” performance excerpts from the company’s repertory.

In January, South African choreographer Dada Masilo brought her reworked version of Swan Lake to the UMass Fine Arts Center. Her company revisits this classic ballet through a South African lens, Masilo tackles issues of sex, gender and homophobia in down-to-earth South African pantsula and gumboot into the mix. Reimagining this ballet to the UMass Fine Arts Center, teach a master class for Five College dancers at UMass and perform Stripped in the Main Studio Theater at Hampshire College. With Stripped, Doug Varone offered an intimate glimpse into the construction of his works. Acting as emcee under simple work lighting, with his dancers dressed only in rehearsal clothes, Varone offered a behind-the-scenes look into how his dance is created, finishing with “stripped” performance excerpts from the company’s repertory.

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The dance studies panel “Women’s Corporalities and Choreographies of Authority: From Antiquity’s Learned Ladies to Entrepreneurial Modern Ballerinas” took place in Nelson Library at Smith College in April. The panel brought two guest scholars to campus: Dr. Zoa Alonso Fernández (Harvard University) and Dr. Laura Katz Rizzo (Temple University).

Each gave a presentation of her research for a large audience of students and faculty members. The presentations shared a feminist perspective, as these scholars interrogated issues of female agency and entrepreneurship in dance.

Alonso Fernández, whose background is in classics, discussed the Roman poetic figure of the docta puella (learned girl) and argued that dance constituted a space for female intellectual discourse in Ancient Rome. Her talk considered, nevertheless, how the association of dancing with lax morality complicated women’s channels of intellectual authority in dance.

For her part, Katz Rizzo surveyed 20th-century productions of Sleeping Beauty in Philadelphia in which women were at the center of the creative process not just as ballerinas but also as restagers, pedagogues and artistic directors. She sought to counter standard historical narratives that minimize the leadership role of women as promoters of ballet in the United States.

Dr. Lester Tomé, assistant professor at Smith College, organized and moderated the panel. The FCDD was a sponsor of the event together with the Smith College Lecture Committee, Department of Dance, Department of Classical Languages and Literatures and Program in the Study of Women and Gender.
HELEN PICKETT’S CHOREOGRAPHIC ESSENTIALS

Helen Pickett was a dancer with William Forsythe’s Ballet Frankfurt for over a decade, resident choreographer for Atlanta Ballet and created Choreographic Essentials, a workshop for young adult artists that was offered at UMass in January, before classes had begun for the spring semester. Rebekah Scott (UM ’18) participated in the workshop.

Before the workshop, we were given a list of pieces of music and chose one to work with. We wrote about the ideas and themes we wanted to explore, and our goals for the workshop. It was very clear that we shouldn’t enter the workshop without having put thought into it beforehand.

Each day began with a ballet class, and afterwards we took about an hour to play with and explore the Forsythe modalities. The rest of the day was devoted to rehearsals. Everyone had a section, and it was up to us not only to choreograph our own, but also figure out how we would transition from one section into the next. I was in a total of four pieces as well as choreographing my own, and the afternoon was always frantically exciting as I ran up and down stairs from rehearsal to rehearsal.

Having someone like Helen come to the Five Colleges and being able to participate in a workshop like this is an invaluable experience. This intensive truly helped open my mind to new ways of seeing and creating dance, and opened my body to new ways of moving.

ABT STUDIO COMPANY AT MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

American Ballet Theatre's Studio Company visited Mount Holyoke College in January 2016 to perform and offer a master class led by Company Artistic Director Kate Lidyon. The ABT Studio Company is a classical ensemble made up of dancers aged 16 to 20. The mission of the company is to prepare those dancers to enter ABT's main company or other leading ballet companies. First-year student Olivia Chandler (MHC '19) wrote the following about the company’s visit:

I have always had a thing for flying, the feeling of being in the air. I'm drawn to the stars, imagining what it would be like to be part of something hypnotic and beautiful. I find these same sensations in ballet. But ballet has done much more than prep my body for flight. Dance matures you, focusing on commitment, teamwork and determination.

I chose to attend Mount Holyoke College instead of a conservatory because I wanted to study both dance and biology. Do I wonder what my life might have been like had I chosen dance full-time? I got a glimpse when the ABT Studio Company came to Mount Holyoke. While the company dancers were on campus, I took class with them. I also served as sound operator for the company’s public performances. These experiences provided an inside look at their world.

The Studio Company performed three dances. In La Bayadère, we were treated to classical lines and control. The soloists, Xuelan Lu and Carlos Gonzalez, were well matched and showed true passion for their art. The second dance was Bier Halle, a dynamic duet performed by Zimmi Coker and Aran Bell. It was a pleasure to watch the animation and energy poured into this dance. The use of épaulement was very effective and made the dancing look effortless. In the final dance, Ballers, the company displayed its flexibility and stamina. The execution of movement and commitment to performing made this piece captivating.

I am grateful for all Mount Holyoke College has offered me. This experience and others have given me opportunities to enrich and broaden my technique, continuing my passion to study dance.

Above: ABT Studio Company members in performance (left), and in class (right)
Grant for New Directions in Scholarship and Teaching. He will also serve as a scholar for the academic year.

**FACULTY UPDATES 2016**

Chris Aiken and Angie Hauser (Assistant Professors, Smith College) received a $5,000 Harriet Fellowship Grant to create their concert Memory of the Future, which was presented at Smith College in April 2016. Chris and Angie directed an all-star cast of dancers and musicians in this evening-length work. Chris created an improvised trio with Montreal-based dancer Andrew Henneman and musician Peter Jones. Angie created a quartet with Bebe Miller, Jennifer Nugent and Mathilde Montfreux. Studio with Joerg Hassman in Germany, at the Labor Gras CONTACT Festival in Austria and performed at the Vienna Ballet. Bebe Miller, Jennifer Nugent and Mike Vargas in Memory of the Future, a concert of improvised works that Chris Aiken and Angie Hauser produced at Smith College in April 2016. Leslie Frye Maita (Guest Artist, UMass) choreographed a short, 6-minute work that toured last summer with Flux: ChoroLab. In partnership with Pioneer Valley Ballet, Flux toured three unique dance works by three very different local dancers—on tour throughout the Pioneer Valley. Performances were held in nontraditional spaces and challenged both maker and viewer to consider the impact of space, time and the unexpected. This same duet was presented in the fall in NYC at Jennifer Muller’s HATCH Presenting Series. Leslie also premiered a new work with local, nonprofessional dancers as part of the “Moving Forward” event at Smith College in April 2016. Leslee and her husband Anthony added the new dance of parenthesis to their lives as they welcomed their first child Morrison-Alexander in January. Joy!

While on a yearlong sabbatical, Paul Matheson (Assistant Professor, Amherst and Mount Holyoke Colleges) attended a three-month silent retreat at the Intrinsic Meditation Society in Bame, MA. In the winter, Paul created a solo, A Man of Our Time, in which he dances, speaks, and sings the book of Genesis backwards. He also began a new piece with longtime collaborator Jennifer Nugent. Last summer, he taught and performed at the Practicing Presence Festival as part of the School for Contemporary Dance & Thought and at the Bates Dance Festival.

Marilyn Sfilla (Five College Lecturer in Dance) is teaching African dance at Jacob’s Pillow during summer 2016. Her group, Barbados Dancers & Drummers, has continued to do arts and education work, including a winter
Candice Salyers (SC MFA '03) and Neel Parkins in Jim Coleman and Teresa Freedenberg’s written in the body

AND NOW A WORD FROM RETIRED FACULTY

Yvonne Daniel participated in a Harvard University webinar on extradance in June. She also created a forthcoming English language collection on dance performance and the pedagogy in Brazil. Additionally, she completed three more solicited chapters and has served as part of the judging panel for the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. Lastly, another trip to Cuba is in the works, where she hopes to take some students and engage with the people.

Rebecca Nordstrom has been enjoying her first year of retirement. She continues to dance for the community, dance with older, and this year she has been enjoying her first year of teaching her first course in Laban’s Choreutics and finds the student again both exciting and humbling.

Marilyn Patton is enjoying being back in the valley and watching student choreography. She had an incredible 80th birthday in December, with more than 70 former students coming to celebrate. She has been enjoying the arts and culture offerings of some of the newest residents of the Pioneer Valley. Marilyn and Sekou continue to feel spiritually renewed as a result of their work in the healing arts at venues that include the Franciscan Hospital for Children, Fitch School of Music in Boston, Shriners Hospital for Children – Boston (branch new for Boston care), Boston Children’s Hospital, and the New England colleges to celebrate 35 years of the Smith College BFA dance program and 45 years of University Dance. It was an evening filled with laughter, love, and dancing.

Peggy Schwartz’s retire ment coincided with the publication of The Dance Claimed: A Biography of Pearl Primus. (Peggy and Murray Schwartz, Yale University Press, 2011). After the book launch at the 62nd Street Y in New York, Peggy and Murray embarked on a lecture tour, which took them from Shanghai to Memphis, from New England colleges to the New York City Public Library. Additionally, Peggy coached Primus’ choreography from North Carolina to Brooklyn and beyond! After being retired for three years, Susan Walker returned to the FCDD for the past two years. She continues to retrench and integrate the extraordinary faculty, students and staff that make this department so highly respected. For the past five years, Susan has taught a class for dancers aged 40 and older, and this year she created three flash mob classes for the dance class, which have been performed in unannounced, unexpected places around the Pioneer Valley.

Andrea Watkins has been working part-time as a personal trainer and group-class instructor at Body Dynamics, Inc., a physical therapy and wellness center. It has been rewarding and challenging work, and her colleagues have been the best. However, after 14 years, she is ready to take a break to be closer to family. She does not plan on teaching movement or doing personal training work, but does plan on finding other outlets to contribute to life.

Erika Johnson (UM ‘04) dances with Boston Dance Company, directed by Katherine Goettler (UM ’97) and Meghan Howard (UM ’01). She also works as an occupational therapist, and is director of dance medicine with Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine in Newton, MA. She celebrated the birth of her daughter Callista in 2014.

Sam Kennedy (SC MFA ’04) begins a term sharing SUNY Fredonia Depart ment of Dance and Theatre this year. In March 2016, her work Colloquia was selected for the ACDA East-Central Conference Gala Concert in Kansas City. This is the third of her choreographic works to be performed at an ACDA Gala since 2010. Sam continues to create for ACDA, during which she will spend six weeks in teaching and choreographing residency with Rumble Dance of Carlisle, PA.

Elisa Lawson (SC MFA ’13) lives in Portland, Oregon, where she dances with Tablo Hoft and works on personal dance projects. Her most recent dance company, Mountain Empire Performance Project, made a presentation on the listening body and making at the 2015 NIDOK conference in Phoenix, AZ, and this year she was an artist-in-residence with DanceArt Curators in Zacatlán, Mexico. Along with Aretha Brown A. Smith (SC MFA ‘16), she co-founded a festival in the Summer Issue of Dance Quarterly.

Justine Lamont (HC ’99) wrote Radical Recreations Non-iconic Movements of Traditions in Kinetic Classical Dance’ which was published in the international peer-reviewed journal Semiotic Inquiry.

Gina Leung (BHC ’12) runs her own company, Ballet LST, and is a Pilates classes in South East England. She is currently in pregnancy and postnatal exercise, working with more than 50 pregnant women and new moms each week.

Kelles Lynch (SC MFA ’17) is working on her thesis, Know Your Own, her second evening length work with Elm City Dance Company, to premiere in spring 2017. She continued to dance for Adele Myers and Dancers and was one of Bates Dance Festival’s 2015 Emerging Choreographers. In the last year, she welcomed a new addition to her family named Eliza Larson.

Meredith Lyons (SC MFA ’08) recently accepted a position as assistant pro fessor in dance at Colorado Mesa University. Previously, she served as the artistic director for Bates Dance Festival and was on faculty at Bates and Colby Colleges. In spring 2016, she had a residency at SPACE Gallery in Portland, Maine. With the closing of Egg’s show, Kellee Lynch (SC MFA ’17) will be on faculty at Bates and Colby Colleges and will also work as a physical therapist and dance teacher. In the fall of 2016, Meredith will be a visiting guest artist at Ohio University, and will present her research project Fundamentals of new work with Rachel.
FCDD ARTISTS DOMINATE 2016 MCC CHOРОГRAPHY FELLOWSHIPS

In May, the Massachusetts Cultural Council announced the 2016 MCC Artist Fellowship awards in Choreography. Four artists were awarded fellowships of $12,000, and five artists received $1,000 finalist awards.

All four of the fellowship recipients have strong ties to the FCDD:

- Deborah Goffe is an assistant professor of dance at Hampshire College and the founder and collaborative director of dance theater company Scapegoat Gardens.
- Candice Salyers (SC MFA ‘03) will be a full-time visiting artist at Mount Holyoke College during 2016–17.
- Stephen Treubig (UM ‘08) is an interdisciplinary choreographer, the founder of KINLAB, and a regular contributor to forums for writing by and about New England dance makers and movement researchers, and an arts and humanities librarian at Amherst College. He has also taught seminars in costume design for FCDD students.
- Dahlia Nayyir (SC ‘99) has taught Indian classical dance at Smith College.

Three of the five finalists are also an important part of the FCDD community:

- Thomas Vacanti (SC MFA ‘97) is an assistant professor of dance at UMass Amherst, co-artistic director of the Pioneer Valley Ballet, and founder of Vacanti Ballets.
- Katie Martin (SC MFA ‘10) is an adjunct faculty member in the FCDD.
- Michelle Marroquin (HC ‘94, SC MFA ‘10) is a Pioneer Valley–based dancer and performance artist.

The MCC Artist Fellowship awards are annually judged, based solely on the artistic quality and creative ability of the work submitted. Applications were open to all eligible Massachusetts artists.

Congratulations to all the award recipients! We are proud of how well you represent the FCDD!