



FIVE COLLEGE DANCE DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER 2010-2011



THE FIREBIRD: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

"Firebird Suite" Thomas Vacanti's new ballet to music by Igor Stravinsky premiered on three different campuses, culminating with the full version at the UMASS faculty concert in December. "I wanted to approach this production as Diaghilev would have, creating strong design and choreographic concepts by working with other artists in the creation of the

ballet . . . The most challenging aspect of this project was keeping all the dancers and designers on track with an overall consistent aesthetic . . . Another challenge was definitely the cast size (40+ dancers) - with a narrative ballet, every last performer needs to be committed to telling the story. . . In the final analysis, I have huge respect for Diaghilev and his ability to juggle the many artists involved in creating productions for the Ballet Russe." Vacanti is an MFA/SC alumna and currently a lecturer in Ballet at UM and co-director of the Pioneer Valley Ballet. He choreographed this new version of the ballet classic in celebration of 100 years of "The Firebird"; the original premiered at the Paris Opera on June 25, 1910. ■



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FAYE DRISCOLL'S *DREAD AND DREAMING*

Nationally renowned New York City choreographer Faye Driscoll (*Dance Magazine* hailed as "1 of 25 to watch") was in residence during J-term, creating a new work on AC/MHC dancers; *DREAD AND DREAMING* premiered on the Five College Dance Concert, March 3–5. Faye wrote of her initial ideas for the project, "It's going to be an investigation of beauty, challenging my own personal and socio-political narrative about 'that which is pleasing to the eye.'" Prior to forming her own company, Faye was a member of Doug Varone and Dancers, performed extensively with Yasmeen Godder and was a choreographic assistant to David Neumann in his creation of *The Common Foreign Language of the Red-Haired People* with Mikhail Baryshnikov. *Village Voice* dance critic Deborah Jowitt writes of Driscoll's recent work, *WOW MOM, WOW*: "any mom attending this funny, impudent feminist circus of a dance better be pretty cool, because these grrrls are channeling their inner wild animals." ■



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Sometimes the object of beauty is not just unexpected but bizarre, with an aspect I initially consider odd or even ugly. Such experiences are revolutions of taste, insights into new or alien aesthetic categories. When I first "got" an Indian temple sculpture, it was as if my molecules were violently rearranged. Something similar happened when I first "got" a painting by Jackson Pollock, say, or Andy Warhol—any strongly innovative artist. As a rule, what had seemed most odd or ugly became the exact trigger of my exaltation."

—Peter Schjeldahl
art critic, *The New Yorker*

MEREDITH MONK: "MAGICIAN OF THE VOICE"

Meredith Monk was the 2011 Leading Woman in the Arts at Mount Holyoke College, in residence April 27–29. A composer, singer, director/choreographer and creator of new opera, Monk is a pioneer in interdisciplinary performance. Her works explore the intersection of music and movement, image and object, light and sound, creating new modes of perception and expression. Her innovative investigations of the voice as an instrument, as an eloquent language in and of itself, expands the boundaries of musical composition, creating landscapes of sound that unearth feelings, energies, and memories for which we have no words. During a career that spans more than 45 years, including a Grammy nomination in 2008 for the CD *impremanance*, audiences and critics have acclaimed Monk as a major creative force in the performing arts. During her residency, she presented a public lecture/performance, "Archeology of an Artist," discussing, screening and performing excerpts from her works. She also taught a workshop, "Dancing Voice/Singing Body" open to all five college students. ■



JESSE FROHMAN

DORIS HUMPHREY'S *PASSACAGLIA*

Paul Dennis, former Limon Dance Company soloist and current Guest Artist at UM, restaged Doris Humphrey's renowned classic *Passacaglia* for UM and five college dancers this fall. In an interview with *Daily Hampshire Gazette* staff writer Kathleen Mellen, Paul spoke about the importance of this piece and the artistic spirit of that era for contemporary student dancers, "The modern dances of those days weren't out for spectacle. . . . Classic modern dance has fundamental characteristics that modern or contemporary dance chooses not to harness. . . . It's not virtuosic . . . but there's an essence of this dance that could only come with maturity. . . . The students are really maturing through it. . . . Without the inner feelings, the training and the skill means absolutely nothing. . . . Dance doesn't have to grab you and spin you around and take you on a joy ride. It could actually have some profundity in simplicity. In community, in working for a common vision. . . . You watch a dance like *Passacaglia*—there is no story, no boy meets girl and happily ever after. But there is something fundamentally satisfying. I think everybody is looking for that." ■



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Frequently people ask me what my work is about and I say I don't know . . . and I don't think it a responsibility for the artist to necessarily understand what it is that he does. I talk a lot about the structure and ideas and how its put together, but ultimately that is not important to appreciate it. If I see a Balanchine ballet or I see a Japanese garden . . . I can appreciate it simply because I like it."

—Robert Wilson
Stage director and playwright

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“What moves straightaway captures our attention; it is consistently at the focal point over what is not moving. This focal tethering to movement is no less first-nature to other creatures than it is to ourselves. We are all attuned to the animate over the inanimate; we are alive to movement from the start. Indeed, animation is at the core of every creature’s engagement with the world because it is in and through movement that the life of every creature—to borrow Husserl’s phrase from the first epigraph—‘acquires reality.’”

—Maxine Sheets-Johnstone
From *The Primacy of Movement*

MASTER CLASSES, WORKSHOPS, LECTURES

The FCDD had another busy year of master classes, workshops and lectures, coordinated among the five campuses and open to all five college students. Master classes were offered from the companies of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, ABT2, Yasuko Yokoshi, Philadanco, Pilobolus. Lar Lubovitch and Friederike Plafki. A number of special workshops and lectures added to the year’s offerings, including: the French company Au Cul du Loup on “Objets Sonores” (Sonic Objects); German video/installation artist Joann Trelu on Video/Installation/Dance; renowned dance anthropologist Yvonne Daniel on “The Swirl of Dance Research: Embodiment and Citizenship in Diaspora Dance”; dance historian Norton Owen of Jacob’s Pillow presented “Morgan on Modernism”; Joyce Lim lectured on “Dance in Japan’s Noh Theatre”; Olie Westheimer and Ivan Bodis-Wollner lectured on movement therapy and Parkinson’s Disease; contemporary French choreographer David Wampach performed his latest solo work “Batterie”, and internationally renowned vocalist, choreographer and director Meredith Monk spoke and performed, “Archeology of an Artist” and led a workshop on, “Dancing Voice/Singing Body”. ■

MAKING VISIBLE THE PROCESS: FRIEDERIKE PLAFKI



Award-winning, Berlin-based choreographer Friederike Plafki presented two works, SOLO Kuhlkuhgenese/Coolcowgenese, and TRIO, Dialogues – Trio Variation for a Square, in October at the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College. Both were accompanied by a live, interactive sound installation by Claude Chassevent. As part of a FCDD residency, she also taught a master class at Mount Holyoke College. Plafki’s works and teaching are concerned with making visible a process of movement phrasing connected by the perception of time and bodily states, as well as precise observation of subtle changes within a movement sequence. Plafki’s residency was hosted by Associate Professor Heidi Gilpin/German Studies at Amherst College. ■

COMMUNITY OUTREACH IN ACTION



The University Dancers toured to a number of area schools and retirement communities during their January tour. Artistic Director Paul Dennis led the lecture demonstrations, featuring excerpts from Tom Vacanti’s *Firebird Suite*, Doris Humphrey’s *Passacaglia* and Bill Bob Brown’s latest Jazz dance, *Like That!* University Dancers members involved the K–12 audiences in an array of hands-on improvisational experiments focused on choreographic and performance issues drawn from each of the works. ■



FOND FAREWELLS

Susan Waltner joined the Smith College dance faculty in 1967. Her long and distinguished career as teacher, choreographer/performer and administrator includes an illustrious legacy of artistic mentoring and the development of a number of key institutional initiatives at Smith and the five colleges. Susan played a key role in the creation of the Five College Dance Department, subsequently twice serving as department Chair. She also founded and has passionately guided the Smith College

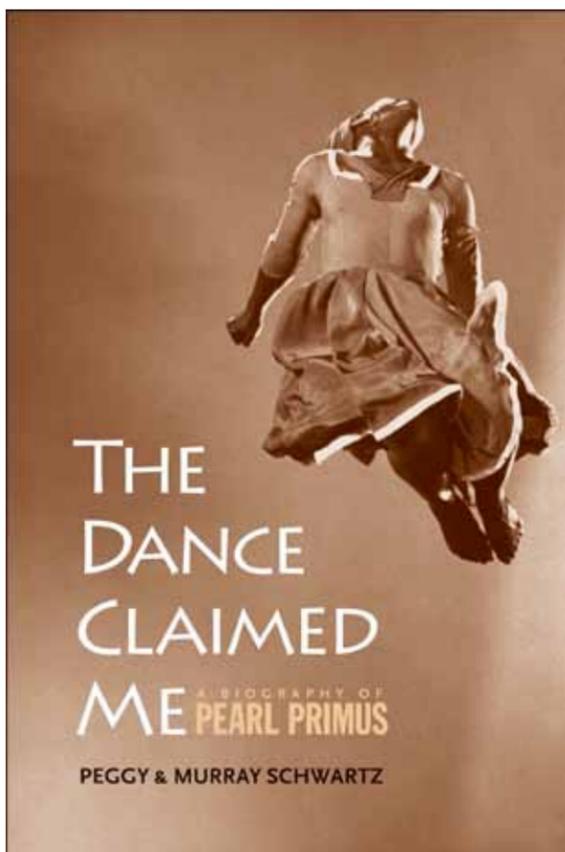


graduate dance program from its inception to the recent 35th anniversary celebrations this year, which were dedicated to her. Susan is a prolific choreographer who has created over 65 original works for herself, her professional peers and especially for Smith and FCDD students. She was an inspiring teacher of modern technique and choreography, and also developed a number of new courses during her tenure, most recently, several courses and repertory projects focused on site-specific dance-making. She also created, *The Mindful Body*, an experiential anatomy course influenced by her studies of Body-Mind Centering. Susan continues to perform and create dances and is currently a member of *The Dance Generators*, an intergenerational company based in Northampton.



Peggy Schwartz joined the FCDD in 1983, bringing her extensive experience and expertise in dance education to bear on the creation of a five college dance education certification program. Through the years, Peggy's passionate, skilled and tireless administrative efforts brought many important initiatives to both the UM and FCDD departments. As FCDD Chair, Peggy secured an NEA-funded National College Choreography Initiative (NCCI) grant for Urban Bushwomen's artistic director, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's creation a new work on five college dancers: *Walking with Pearl*. Based on the life and work of African-American dance pioneer Pearl Primus, this dance was subsequently

developed into a repertory work for Urban Bushwomen. A founding member of the National Dance Education Organization, Peggy's active leadership in numerous national dance organizations helped expand FCDD's regional and national profile. As long-time chair of the UMass dance department, Peggy developed a number of important programs, including, in 2008, the Sankofa Dance Project: Celebrating African Roots in American Dance. For three years, this visionary program brought community workshops, master choreographers and performances of African-based dance to the region. Throughout her tenure, Peggy was a very popular teacher of improvisation, choreography, dance education and yoga; in 1994, she was named Massachusetts Dance Educator of the Year. Peggy's retirement this year fittingly coincides with the publication of her new book (co-authored with her husband, Murray Schwartz), *Pearl Primus: The Dance Claimed Me*. This publication serves as an especially fitting culmination and tribute to Peggy's tireless, visionary efforts to honor and celebrate the legacy of African traditions in America dance. ■



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"I can't imagine a great university without a school of the arts... If you believe, as I do, that the arts are a fundamental means of thought and communication, why wouldn't you easily conclude that they must be a part of the university community? If I had to choose between an expository form of expression and an intuitive form of expression, I would choose the latter to be more profound. I think it is a false premise that the arts are an add-on to ordinary life."

—Lee Bollinger
President, Columbia University

SMITH MFA PROGRAM CELEBRATES 35 YEARS



JOHN CRISPIN

The MFA degree program at Smith was inaugurated in the fall of 1976, coinciding with the establishment of the Five College Dance Department. This year, on the eve of its 35th anniversary, and on the occasion of the retirement of its founder, Professor Susan Waltner, the department celebrated the remarkable successes of the program and its 145 alumni.

For more than 30 years, the dance artist/teachers pursuing an MFA have enhanced the creative energy of Smith College and the Five College Dance Department. MFA alumni have gone to pursue an incredible range of careers, some establishing their own dance companies, many becoming professional performers and/or choreographers; there is also a lawyer, a midwife, a minister, an actor, a physical therapist, as well as several writers. A great many have become artist-educators in secondary schools and colleges and universities, some with Ph.D.s. They continue to contribute to the dance communities in the United States, Portugal, Israel, Taiwan, Poland, Ireland, France, Greece, Scotland, the Dominican Republic, Canada and the Middle East.

This year's celebrations included the hosting of a variety of alumni projects—teachers and guest artists included: Mary Anne deLisle Kodzis '96, Brenda Divelbliss '99, Candice Salyers '03, Cathy Nicoli '04, Katie Martin '10, Megan Bonneau McCool '99, Heidi Henderson '98, Jennifer Kayle '99, Cathy Nicoli '04, Rebecca Nordstrom '79, Peter Schmitz '86, Virginia Scholl '79, Sarah Seely '01 and Thomas Vacanti '04. ■

THE DANCE CLAIMED ME: A BIOGRAPHY OF PEARL PRIMUS BY PEGGY AND MURRAY SCHWARTZ

Pearl Primus (1919–1994) blazed onto the dance scene in 1943 with stunning works that incorporated social and racial protest into their dance aesthetic. In *The Dance Claimed Me*, published by Yale University Press, Peggy and Murray Schwartz, friends and colleagues of Primus offer an intimate perspective on her life and explore her influences on American culture, dance, and education. They trace Primus's path from her childhood in Port of Spain, Trinidad, through her rise as an influential international dancer, an early member of the New Dance Group (whose motto was "Dance is a weapon"), and a pioneer in dance anthropology. The 92nd Street Y presented an afternoon of dancing, reading, and booksigning on April 29, which included performances of four rousing Primus works: *Negro Speaks of Rivers*, *Strange Fruit*, *Hard Time Blues*, and *Bushasche*, performed by UMass students and other special guests. ■



The Five College Dance Department 2010-2011

"AMERICAN MASTERPIECES": MERCE CUNNINGHAM



The Five College Dance Department received a prestigious "American Masterpieces" grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to fund the Merce Cunningham repertory project: "EVENTS" next year. This work will consist of a collage of excerpts from the Cunningham repertory from the past 3 decades, and will be restaged by long-time company member and current Juillard faculty member, Banu Ogun. Performances by two different casts will take place at theaters, museums and public venues on all five campuses through the fall semester. These will also include a number of original costume, set and sound designs by five college artists.

"You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive."

—Merce Cunningham



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"I don't mean by this that dance is more natural than language, or more true. I see dance that is untrue every day of the week: dance that is full of clichés and ballast and nonsense. As for language, I think it is a heroic endeavor. No, each is as true and false as the other. People who say that movement does not lie generally assume that language is a doctored or at least indirect version of the truths that dance expresses directly. This is the reverse of the position of those who want us, before we review a dance, to determine the choreographer's intent: they think that dance is an indirect version of truths that language can speak directly. Neither view is correct. And this should come as a comfort, at least to dance-watchers. So much of life is spent in the difficult task of trying to understand things, to see through them to what's on the other side. But the truths of dance are not on the other side. They are in the very bones of the dance, which our bones know how to read, if we let them."

—Joan Accocella
Dance critic, *The New Yorker*

SMITH COLLEGE AND FCDD WELCOME CHRIS AIKEN AND ANGIE HAUSER

Chris Aiken and Angie Hauser will join the Smith Dance program and the FCDD next fall in a new, shared appointment in Contemporary Dance. Chris is a leading international teacher and performer of dance improvisation and contact improvisation. He has performed and collaborated with many renowned dance artists including Steve Paxton, Kirstie Simson, Nancy Stark Smith, Peter Bingham, and Andrew Harwood; he has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship. Angie is a nationally

renowned performer and dance improviser — she was awarded a BESSIE in 2006 — and long-time member of the Bebe Miller Company. She has also danced in the companies of Elizabeth Streb, Liz Lerman and Butoh artist, Poppo Shiriashi. Chris and Angie are currently touring nationally with their new NPN-commissioned work "Dwell", inspired by the works of the artist Joseph Cornell.

