



Dawn Springer Dance Projects synthesize contemporary ballet and feminist thought. The performances employ an empathetic mode of watching dance, valuing virtuosity as a form of agency for the dancer, particularly as it relates to gender. The choreography, made in close collaboration with dancers, composers and artists from other mediums, contrasts powerful and explosive vocabulary with distilled moments of physical surrender. Emphasizing the felt experience over objectification, DSDP engages multiple movement forms to push the boundaries of how we view dance and the dancer.

mesmerizing --Spin Magazine

beautiful, original dance --Shepherd Express

surging and lush -- Philadelphia Inquirer

subtle yet striking -- Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

a stand out -- Durham Indy Weekly

beautiful composition --Milwaukee Magazine

Contact: dawn.springer@gmail.com 917-701-3113

Current Project

SYLPH

Premiere October 11th + 12th, Jan Serr Studio, Milwaukee

in American English

(sɪlf)

NOUN

in Paracelsus's alchemical system, any of a class of mortal, soulless beings supposed to inhabit the air

a slender, graceful woman or girl

is always young, female



Sylph examines the weight and interior experience of gendered expectations in ballet. The piece was developed in close collaboration with five professional ballet artists over the past year. With music by renowned composer and percussionist Jon Mueller, the piece will premiere in the round October 11th and 12th at the Jan Serr Studio on Milwaukee's East Side. Exploring extreme ranges of physical movement quality, from hyper exactitude and failed attempts at levitation, to full-bodied weighted surrender, the piece asks how we both define and consume femininity as viewers.

Biographies for current contributing artists below.

Select Press

Hosted by Salam Fatayer

Milwaukee choreographer challenges ballet traditions, gender norms

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Ballet is exquisite, with a beauty that lies in a harmonious blend of movement, music and storytelling. The grace and precision of the dancers create visual poetry that evokes deep emotions and transports audiences to otherworldly realms. The technical skill required to be delicate and powerful is a feast for the eyes.

However, ballet also has ties to heteronormativity. Originating in the royal courts of the Renaissance, ballet reinforced strict masculine and feminine stereotypes, with male dancers portraying strong, dominant figures while female dancers embodied grace and passivity. Classic ballets often center around heterosexual romances, and training, costuming and presentation emphasize gender distinctions — further embedding these norms.

Contemporary ballet challenges these conventions, promoting more diverse and inclusive representations. A Milwaukee-based choreographer embodies that thinking through a new project exploring intimacy, gender and partnership.

Dawn Springer is a member of the teaching faculty at UW-Milwaukee who has performed and traveled internationally as an artist and speaker. Most recently, she created “Step of Two,” a duet featuring former Milwaukee Ballet dancers Itzel Hernandez and Annia Hidalgo — two women performing together in a deconstructed classical ballet Pas de Deux.

On this episode of Uniquely Milwaukee, I sat down with Springer and dancers Rachel Malehorn, Janel Hutchison and Sejain Bastidas to talk about “Step of Two,” bringing your life to the performance and what it means to move the needle toward more inclusivity within the industry.

Listen:

<https://radiomilwaukee.org/podcast/uniquely-milwaukee/2024-06-18/milwaukee-ballet-gender-norms>



Shepherd Express
Milwaukee's Alternative News Source



Dawn Springer-Jon Mueller's Dance Performance

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER SEP. 24, 2018 10:22 A.M.

I feel very lucky to have witnessed the terrific 40-minute performance created by choreographer Dawn Springer and composer Jon Mueller that was presented twice last Saturday evening in an ancient Bay View warehouse far off anybody's beaten path. Even with address in hand, some friends from Danceworks and I had to hunt a good while to find the building, entrance and second floor room. It only added to the sense that this was something special.

We entered the white-walled, high-ceilinged room to find ballet dancer Janel Meindersee, recently retired from Milwaukee Ballet, quietly warming up on stage. Recorded music by Mueller cast a spell on the room with so-slowly-changing, low pitched chords—ancient is a word that comes to mind but maybe timeless is better; a carefully-chosen spell, in any case. No welcoming speech interrupted the meditative atmosphere. Instead, Meindersee took center stage and, perfectly poised, rose on point and balanced at astonishing length. Upstage, percussionist Mueller and pianist David Utzinger began their accompaniment. Suddenly, Meindersee exploded into a series of big balletic movements. She stopped as suddenly, waited for us to breathe and listen, and then executed a string of fast spins on point. Another pause, then another difficult string of big classical ballet moves deployed for sheer impact. We were moments into the dance and already I wanted to cheer.

No chance. Voices, drumming and piano chords suddenly split the air, almost terrifying at first. It was the start of a Herculean performance by Utzinger and Mueller of exactly repeated driving

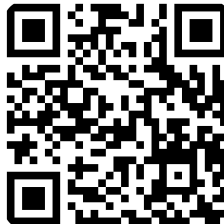
percussive patterns that continued and deepened in minimalist fashion over a very, very long time. The stamina and sheer muscle required to execute this score seems unbelievable. In a program note, Mueller tells us the music was written for a recording in 2010 but this, slightly reconfigured, is its first live performance.

Enter dancers Rachel Malehorn, also retired from Milwaukee Ballet and dancing as powerfully as ever, and Annia Hidalgo, still a leading artist with that company and regularly flooring audiences with her skill and charisma. The muscles of the three dancers were as heartily tested in balances, spins and footwork: long stretches of speedy stepping on point in place. Springer put familiar ballet moves into unique, extreme constructions; every phrase was an event. Likewise, major groove shifts in the music arrived. Time flew. The end echoed the start: Hidalgo alone now—moving, listening, moving, listening.

John Schneider is the Shepherd's dance writer. He is a longtime artist-in-residence and performing arts faculty member at Marquette University, and the founding director of the much-awarded Project Non-Violence.

For more information, please visit:

www.dawnspringer.com



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CURRENT CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS:

Sejain Bastidas was born in Caracas, Venezuela. She started her ballet training at the age of seven, at the Freddy Reyna Ballet and Music School and finished her training and graduated as a professional ballet dancer at Fundación Gustavo Franklin Ballet Arte School. She has been part of many professional ballet companies, including Ballet Contemporaneo de Caracas (2009), The Metropolitan Ballet in Minneapolis, Minnesota (2010-2011), the Nina Novak Ballet (2011), Ballet Nuevo Mundo de Caracas (2012-2013), and the Compania de Ballet del Teatro Teresa Carreño de Caracas (2013-2016). She has also danced as a soloist dancer with the National Ballet of Ecuador (2016-2017) and The National Ballet of Peru (2017-2022). Sejain participated in the opening gala of the 2019 PanAmerican Games, the World Ballet Competition in Orlando, Florida, and she has been featured in dance history books in her home country of Venezuela. She was involved in a social media campaign with the United Nations about arts and immigration in Latin America and also had a mini-documentary made about her story as an immigrant artist on the Ecuadorian television show “Cara a Cara con Rosalía.”

Alana Griffith began her training at the Los Angeles Ballet Academy before moving to London at 17 to train at the English National Ballet School. In her graduating year, she was selected to work with the company in Wayne Eagling’s *The Nutcracker*. That same season, she toured England, performing in Matthew Hart’s *The Sleeping Beauty* with English National Ballet II. Griffith joined Milwaukee Ballet II in the 2012-2013 season and was promoted to the Company in 2014.

Griffith’s career highlights include dancing title role of Alice in Septime Webre’s *ALICE* (in wonderland), Odette in Michael Pink’s *Swan Lake*, and Belle in Pink’s *Beauty and the Beast*. She has been featured in many more of Michael Pink’s ballets, including as Clara and Marie in *The Nutcracker*, Spring Fairy in *Cinderella*, Rapunzel in the world premiere of *Beauty and the*

Beast, the leading role in *Aubade*, the Prayer in *Coppélia*, and Wendy in *Peter Pan*. She has appeared in many additional soloist and principal roles, including Effie in *La Sylphide*, Helena in Bruce Well's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Romola in Timothy O'Donnell's *Sacre*, and the final Pas De Deux in Alejandro Cerrudo's *Extremely Close*. She has worked with celebrated choreographers Matthew Tusa, Trey McIntyre, George Williamson, Kenneth Tindall, Val Caniparoli, Mauro de Candia, Dani Rowe, Aleix Mañe, and Mark Godden.

In 2017, she was named one of *Pointe Magazine's* "Stars of the Corps." She was promoted to Leading Artist in 2023.

Originally from Havana, Cuba, **Itzel Hernandez** began training at the Escuela Provincial de Ballet Alejo Carpentier. At age 12, she moved to the United States and earned a full scholarship at the Orlando Ballet School under Peter Stark, where she performed as Clara in Bruce Mark's *The Nutcracker*. At the Harid Conservatory, Hernandez trained under Victoria Schneider, Olivier Pardina, and Svetlana Osiyeva, and appeared in Mark Godden's *Fable* and *Corazon de La Llama*. After graduating, she joined Orlando Ballet where she performed in *La Danse* by Telmo Moreira, the lead roles in Robert Hill's *Allegretto* and *Huapango*, as well as Abdur Rahim Jackson's premiere of *aGain fOr tHe firSt tImE*. Hernandez has competed in the Youth American Grand Prix, winning 3rd place in 2009 and 1st place Senior Contemporary in 2014. She joined the Nancy Einhorn Milwaukee Ballet II Program in 2014, where she danced in Michael Pink's *Don Quixote*, *The Nutcracker*, *Giselle*, and *Cinderella* before joining the Company in 2015.

Annia Hidalgo began her training in the province of Holguín and continued at the Cuban National Ballet School in Havana under Professor Ramona de Saa. In 2004, she was awarded the Gold Medal in the International Ballet Competition. That same year, she joined The Cuban National Ballet as a soloist, under Alicia Alonso. Her repertoire includes soloist and principal roles in *La Fille Mal Gardée*, *Coppélia*, *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *Don Quixote*, *Paquita*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *La Bayadère*, *Scheherazade* and *Prince Igor*. Hidalgo has performed as a principal dancer with Media City Ballet and Los Angeles Ballet. Since joining Milwaukee Ballet as a Leading Artist, she has danced as Alice in Septime Webre's *ALICE* (in wonderland) and featured roles Michael Pink's ballets, including *Musetta* in *La Bohème*, *Odile* in *Swan Lake*, *Lucy* and *Mina* in *Dracula*, *Snow White* in *Mirror Mirror*, *Belle* in *Beauty and the Beast* and the title roles in *Giselle* and *Cinderella*. She also appeared in the winning pieces from *Genesis 2013* (Gabrielle Lamb's *Manifold*), *2015* (Garrett Smith's *Mortal Form*), *2019* (Aleix Mañe's *Exilio*) and *2022* (Price Suddarth's *Aftermath*). Hidalgo has danced as a guest artist with Rockford Dance Company, Alma Dance Theatre and was proud to appear in the premiere performance of Refuge Foundation for the Arts. This summer, she will dance with *Queer the Ballet* in New York City, and will appear in her sixth season with the *Traverse City Dance Project*. She enjoys sharing her knowledge of classical ballet as a teacher and coach in various summer programs around the country.

Janel Meindersee's career in classical ballet includes over a decade of performance with companies including Oregon Ballet Theatre, Nevada Ballet Theatre, and Milwaukee Ballet. During her tenure dancing with resident ballet companies, Janel performed classical, contemporary, and world premier works by local and international choreographers. She cultivated a love for dance as an expressive art form and a passion for impacting communities through dance.

In 2018, Janel began studying full-time at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She continued to pursue creative dance opportunities, including performing as a guest artist with ballet companies, engaging in creative projects with local choreographers, presenting original work at art showcases, and developing dance program opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities.

Janel earned her bachelor's degree in 2021 and master's degree in 2022 from UW-Madison. Most recently, Janel began navigating life as a new mother with the birth of her son, Everett in 2023.

Renowned percussionist and drummer **Jon Mueller** is celebrated for his uncommon technique, rigor and virtuosity. Mueller's aim has been to move drums, percussion and rhythm from its anticipated backbeat to a central musical focus, something more intuitive and natural than usually imagined. Audiences throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, and the United Kingdom have experienced this idiosyncratic point of view as, paradoxically, both 'cathartic' and 'meditative'. Notable solo performances have taken place at the Guggenheim Museum, New Museum, Issue Project Room, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, Alverno Presents, Columbia Experimental Music Festival, SXSW, Big Ears Festival, Hopscotch Fest and Witching Hour Festival.

From 2013-15, Mueller created and directed the multi-disciplinary project Death Blues. The project issued four critically acclaimed recordings. Rolling Stone cited non-fiction as one of the '20 Best Avant Albums of 2014'. Ensemble, created with multi-instrumentalist William Ryan Fritch, was featured on NPR's 'First Listen'.

Outside of his solo work, Mueller has performed and recorded with the groups Who is the Witness?, Mind Over Mirrors, Volcano Choir, Collections of Colonies of Bees and Pele, and has worked in depth with artists Aaron Turner, Faith Coloccia, Dawn Springer, Chris Hefner, Jason Kahn, Hal Rammel, Asmus Tietchens, Z'EV, Andrew McKenzie, Rhys Chatham, Jarboe, James Plotkin, Duane Pitre, Jonathan Kane, and Raymond Dijkstra.

His solo work has been released by Table of the Elements, Type Recordings, Important Records, Taiga Records, SIGE Records, American Dreams, and others.
Jon Mueller plays Dream Cymbals.

Ellie Rabinowitz (lighting design) has enjoyed a varied career in lighting, working in everything from animation to dance, fine art to music, teaching and theater. In Milwaukee, productions include 6 seasons as resident lighting designer for UW-Milwaukee's Dance Department, many of The Constructivists' shows, as well as The Way She Spoke, The Island, Hoops and The Mountaintop at Milwaukee Chamber Theater. In addition, she enjoys encouraging artistic communities through her positions as one of Wisconsin's regional contacts for Burning Man and on Shorewood's Public Art Committee.

Choreographer **Dawn Springer** has worked across the country and abroad. Throughout her training and performance career, she was fortunate to perform with many wonderful choreographers including Helen Simoneau Danse, Camille A. Brown (multi-Tony Award Nominee), Sara Hook, Jeff Slayton (Merce Cunningham Dance), Sarah Skaggs, Dahlia Nayar, and Aynsley Vandenbroucke Movement Group, among others. Her performances have included Lincoln Center, The Kennedy Center, The Venice Biennale Danza, New York Live Arts, and the Baryshnikov Arts Center. Her choreography for the Collection of Colonies of Bees was performed as the opener for Grammy Award winning and nominated artists Bon Iver and Sylvan Esso. She toured the United States as an adjudicator for the American Dance Festival and was an artist-in-residence for two consecutive seasons with Alverno Presents and for two years at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland.

She has choreographed, taught and lectured at The Ailey School, The University of the Arts, The Banff Center, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Dickinson College, Beloit College, Lawrence University, Cardinal Stritch University, The American College Dance Festival Association, and at The Congress on Research and Dance and The Society of Dance History Scholars. Her writing is published in the Perspectives on American Dance Anthology by the University Press of Florida. She trained on scholarship at the North Carolina School of the Arts, and was part of the first cohort for the American Dance Festival/Hollins University MFA program under the direction of Donna Faye Burchfield (awarded the rank of Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters from the French Ministry of Culture, 2023). She is on faculty in the Peck School of the Arts and at the Milwaukee Ballet, where she creates contemporary repertory with Milwaukee Ballet II and the Pre-Professional Program dancers.

Leslie Vaglica is a costume designer and technician. She is academic staff at the University of Wisconsin Parkside where she teaches Costumecraft and is engaged in research on the value of costume technology education. She designs for opera, theater, and dance and is most proud of her designs for performances such as Dali's Liquid Ladies (True Penny Theater), Mr. Burns (Luminous Theatre), Svadba (Milwaukee Opera Theater), Three Decembers (The Florentine Opera), and The Penelopiad (UWParkside). She has built costumes for off-broadway productions as well as regional theaters such as the Milwaukee Repertory Theater and American Players Theatre. Other creative endeavors include roller derby uniforms (2008-2014), costumes for UW Milwaukee Dance Department (2014-2024), The Milwaukee Riverkeepers Boat Parade (2020-2023), and The Clackathon (2024). She holds a BA in Art and Political Science from the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. She trained with Elizabeth Gaston, Joann Guendel, and Alex Tecoma at Mt. Mary University where she earned a Certificate in Apparel Production and Design.