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PERFORM

Mark Foehringer Dance Project: Painting pictures with movement, quite literally

By Rachel Howard

There's your standard motion-capture software and then, apparently, there's "dance room spectroscopy," an award-winning program created by Stanford visiting scholar David Glowacki. It's the star component in the Mark Foehringer Dance Project's new "Dances of the Sacred and Profane," allowing visual artist Camille Utterback to create flowing patterns and images triggered by Foehringer's choreography. "Dances of the Sacred and Profane" will reopen Fort Mason's Cowell Theater after 18 months and \$20 million in seismic upgrades and lobby improvements. We spoke to Foehringer on rehearsal break, seagulls crying in the background.

Q: How did this team come together?

A: Camille and I were both artists in residence at Djerassi (artist colony) in 2011. She's always wanted to make a work based in choreography. Now Camille is at Stanford, and she happened to run into David. David is the mastermind behind the particles moving, and Camille is the artist painting on canvas.

Q: So your dancers are like her paintbrushes? What do the strokes look like?

A: My inspiration was Impressionist paintings. We were trying to find ways of playing with angle and shadow and light. The projections triggered by the dancers' movements can look sometimes like brushstrokes, sometimes like etchings — it's very hard to describe. But the dancers are pushing

If you go

Mark Foehringer Dance Project: 8 pm Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday. Through Sept. 21. \$18.50-\$28.50. Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, Marina Boulevard and Buchanan Street, S.F. (800) 838-3006. www.mfdpsf.org.



Frederic Boulay

From "Dances of the Sacred and Profane" at Cowell Theater, Fort Mason: Melissa Kaufman-Gomez and Thomas Woodman.

the particles that are making the drawings. We can tell the software to drop the particles from the dancer's arm — or show where the dancer sends the particles with his arm.

Q: You also have an interactive score by Michael St. Clair.

A: We're using recordings from Debussy, Ravel and Fauré. When the camera tells the system the dancer is reaching a certain position, we'll hear a programmed part of the score. Or when the girl gets twisted so high and gets dropped, the sound is programmed to also do that kind of thing.

Q: Why "Dances of the Sacred and Profane"?

A: The title is taken out of Debussy. This is the company's 19th season, and in planning for our 20th, I started thinking about what inspires people to make art. I came to the conclusion: things that are otherworldly, and things that are flesh. The sacred is the otherworldly, what we cannot control, nature. And the profane is the physical body.

Q: You debuted Mark Foeh-

ringer Dance Project in 1996, but some years you've been more active than others. Now you're making your most ambitious work; you've founded the Conservatory for Contemporary Dance for high school kids; you've got a new home at 1 Grove St. What's behind the resurgence?

A: We've been busy developing the conservatory. We've been producing the annual "Nutcracker Sweets," developing a family audience, thinking that as those kids grow older they might become our audience for other works. I decided in the company's year 10 that we would have our own space, and now (nine years later) we've found the right partners, SAFEhouse (for the Performing Arts). I've been traveling to Peru on three Fulbright grants, setting eight of my ballets on the National Ballet of Peru and helping to start a new BFA in dance program. So I don't know that our latest activity is a resurgence.

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