

DANCE

Hope springs eternal

Do Jump! reopens a dynamic display of wide-eyed optimism

BY REBECCA RAGAIN

How do you dance paradise? What movement represents hope? What music embodies possibility?

These are the kinds of questions that Robin Lane addresses in *¡Entusiasmo!* A Show About Hope, the latest production from Do Jump! Extremely Physical Theater. The show tells the story of a village in Colombia called Gaviotas, which has become a model sustainable community and an inspiration to dreamers and idealists.

The village began nearly 35 years ago, when a group of visionaries started the community as a social experiment. Their leader, Paolo Lugari, purposefully picked one of the harshest areas of Colombia to incubate his dream: the llanos, eastern savannas with poor soil, located in the middle of drug trafficking paths and guerrilla activity. He reasoned that if the experiment worked there, it could work anywhere.

"Lugari had a vision of creating a place where people could live in peace and have a positive effect on their environment and the people that were near them," says Lane, a lesbian who serves as artistic director of Do Jump!

Gaviotas evolved into a community reputed to have no laws, no crime and no poverty. Innovative technology—such as children's seesaws that power clean water pumps—allows the village to be almost entirely self-sufficient in terms of energy usage. In 1997, the United Nations awarded the village the World Prize in Zero Emissions.

In 1998, journalist Alan Weisman wrote the book *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World*. His portrait of the place captivated many readers, including Lane, who first noticed it on the "staff picks" shelf at Powell's.

When Lane read the book three years ago, she was contemplating the idea of doing a new kind of production: one with a narrative. Usually, a Do Jump! show will follow a theme through a progression of scenes but won't tell a story per se.

The story of Gaviotas had a strong effect on Lane, partly because she sees a parallel between Lugari's quest and her own creative process.

Lugari convinced people to follow him into the llanos in search of an ideal community, even though no one knew precisely how it would unfold. Lane manifests her personal artistic vision in each of her works, bringing both performers and audiences with her on the journey.

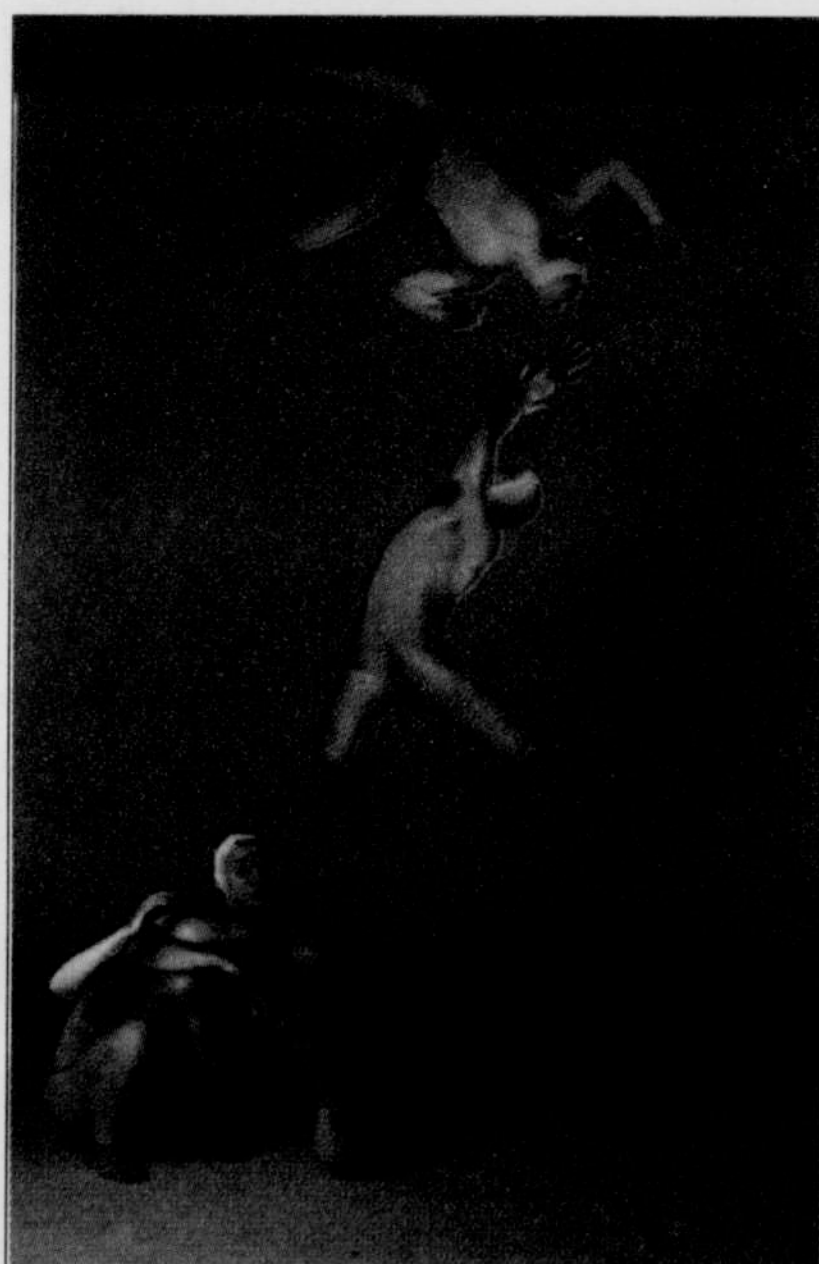
"It talked about how you make a vision into reality. How you convince people to go along with you. How you really don't understand what's going to happen," she says. "In making art, you start from nothing and you make something. And it is nothing like the thing you imagined, and it is exactly the thing you imagined. That's what really moved me."

Lane started crafting *¡Entusiasmo!* by writing a script, adapting the narrative from Weisman's book. She also brainstormed with one of

her troupe's longtime composers, Joan Szymko, about musical possibilities for the piece.

Instead of relying solely on the usual collaborators, Szymko encouraged Lane to try to find authentic music from the llanos region of Colombia. This seemed essential to Szymko, because the work is so much about creating a sense of place.

Lane did some research and found only one group that seemed like a good fit. Appropriately, they are called Los Llaneros. They specialize in the traditional music of the area, playing instruments such as the llanero harp, cuatro and maracas.



Just in time for Earth Day, *¡Entusiasmo!* tells the story of the environmental evolution of a Colombian village.

Los Llaneros agreed to the project, so Lane started working closely with Karin Stein, the group's artistic director. Lane and Stein sent recordings back and forth and traded e-mails and phone calls. Stein shared recordings from her family's rain forest and even composed a piece especially for *¡Entusiasmo!*

While Lane acted as the hub for the musical arrangements, Szymko also came officially on board as a composer. She was faced with the refreshing challenge of mixing her more European-style, orchestral choices with the music of the llaneros.

"What I did then was wrote an overture that explores themes—both my own original themes and also some from the llaneros music, too," says Szymko, who is a lesbian.

Though both the narrative structure and the llaneros music are unique to this production, the audience can count on seeing favorite characteristics of a regular Do Jump! show.

The performers dazzle with their combination of acting, acrobatics and aerial feats. The troupe will act out some monkey business on

stage—check the *¡Entusiasmo!* posters for a sneak peek—and perform suspended from hammocks.

People who saw the premiere of *¡Entusiasmo!* one year ago will find much new material to appreciate. There are three new movement pieces, including one that plays off a particular traditional dance of the llanos region.

It's not unusual for Do Jump! to debut a production and then fine-tune it through repeated rehearsals. But Lane and the performers have put *¡Entusiasmo!* through a much more rigorous revision process. All of the pieces have been edited, and new groupings added. Fewer words make for a more concise narrative.

"It's going to be very different," says Lane. "The pieces have been taken apart and put back together again."

Szymko adds: "One thing Robin does really wonderfully is how things transition one into the other. The show is seamless, even though there's all these different elements."

Szymko is not exaggerating; the show has many facets. Olga Sanchez of Miracle Theatre Group is performing the voice-overs. The lighting specialist for Do Jump! recently won an award in Los Angeles for his work, and Lane reports that he's also done a great job for *¡Entusiasmo!* Lane's brother, a videographer and animator, has created a video set that is projected on stage. There's even an art installment in conjunction with the show that will be on display in the atrium of Newmark Theatre.

"I feel really good about the show because I feel like it's a synthesis of several pieces: the visuals, the music, the performing. Everybody—whatever they're doing—is brilliant at it," says Lane.

She hopes audiences will walk away from the show feeling the same way she did after reading Weisman's book: empowered, hopeful and inspired. "[Lugari] decided to do exactly what his heart wanted, in this situation where nothing said yes. And he did more than that," she says.

When Lane first read the book, she was particularly depressed by what President Bush was doing to the U.S. government but felt helpless to do anything about it.

"This book really changed my opinion," Lane says. "Stories of hope, and especially hope in desperate situations that have positive outcomes, are essential."

Szymko, who also invested herself emotionally in the production, sees a take-home message similar to Lane's.

"Possibility," she says. "I want them to feel it on a personal level as well as a global level."

¡ENTUSIASMO! A SHOW ABOUT HOPE plays 7:30 p.m. April 22 and 23 and 3 p.m. April 24 at Newmark Theatre, 1111 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$20-\$26 from 503-231-1232 or TicketsWest.

REBECCA RAGAIN is a free-lance writer who is making all her friends read Weisman's book.

SUNDAY, MAY 8



AMY RAY

FAMILY OUTING
FEATURING JODY BLEYLE



CRYSTAL BALLROOM
DANCEONAIR.COM
1332 W BURNSIDE, PORTLAND, OREGON
ALL AGES • TICKETMASTER OUTLETS
7PM DOORS, 8PM SHOW



Looking for
someone to
grow old with?

Try the
Just Friends
Voice Personal ads.
Submit your ad at
www.justout.com