

dance

# A Decade of Dance

White Bird celebrates 10th season with the return of acclaimed choreographer

by Rebecca Ragain

In 1997, a new organization called White Bird presented its first performance: Paul Taylor Dance Company.

Now White Bird is celebrating 10 years in existence by bringing an updated program by Paul Taylor, who is recognized as one of the greatest American choreographers.

At age 77, Taylor continues to create an average of two new dances a year. As of 2007, he has choreographed 126 dances and is the recipient of so many awards that they completely fill half a page of paper when typed in 12-point font.

His two companies, Paul Taylor Dance Company and Taylor 2, tour steadily, dancing his works. Taylor has also licensed his dances to be performed by more than 75 companies worldwide.

Interpretation of some of Taylor's dances, such as 1991's "Company B," can lead one to consider Taylor a gay choreographer. For instance, in a *New York Times* dance roundup called "Portraits of Gay Men, with No Apologies," Jack Anderson wrote that "Company B" is "a reminder that during World War II homosexuality was cause for discharge from the armed forces."

Taylor is not forthcoming about his personal life in interviews. However, in his autobiography, called *Private Domain*, he shares that he is attracted to both women and men, usually preferring "whomever I wasn't with" at the time, as he wryly put it.

In any case, the choreographer is not a man with a lot of time to put into relationships outside the dance world. In *Private Domain*, he reflects that his company is like his family—a family that has now performed in more than 500 cities and 62 countries.

When Taylor first started making dance, the success that he has achieved today was far from a sure bet. In the 1950s, he challenged audiences and critics with experimental works that didn't fit within the parameters of modern dance at the time.

In *Private Domain*, Taylor wrote about one of his first works, "Seven New Dances": "The dance is pretty stark.... Maybe folks won't go for this sort of thing. But I shove the notion aside."

Indeed, "Seven New Dances" nearly emptied the theater. It also inspired *Dance Observer* to run a blank column, a now famous nonreview submitted by critic Louis Horst.

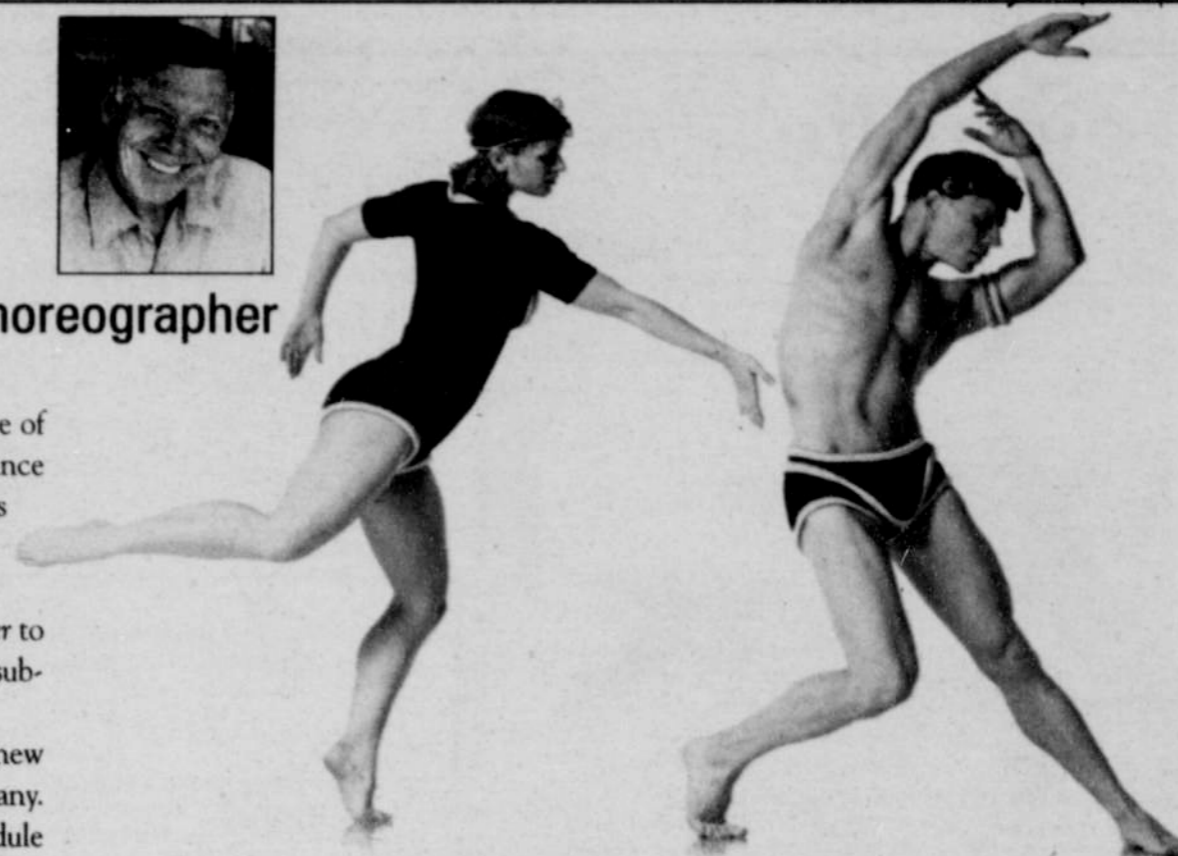
Undeterred, Taylor continued to make new dances and began touring with his small company. Initially, touring was arranged around the schedule of the Martha Graham Dance Company, for which Taylor was dancing in increasingly important roles.

In 1962, Taylor left Graham's company to concentrate on his own choreography. He and his company toured Paris, where he started to choreograph what would prove to be one of his most-loved (by audiences) and longest-lived dances, "Aureole."

Paul Taylor Dance Company will open the Portland program with "Aureole," a lighthearted work set to music by G.F. Handel that typically brings smiles to audience members' faces. In an article for *Panache*, Susan Reiter described it as a "deceptively breezy, playful yet tender dance for five white-clad dancers."

When "Aureole" premiered in 1962, no one in Taylor's company had any idea that they would be dancing this work hundreds upon hundreds of times, all over the world. Nor did they foresee that it would be danced by many other companies, as well as learned and performed by generations of new Paul Taylor Dance Company dancers.

Although the Portland program begins with what the Oxford Dictionary of Dance calls one of Taylor's sunniest works, it ends with one of his darkest dances ever. In the 2005 anti-war piece



LOIS GREENFIELD

At age 77, Paul Taylor (above) continues to create about two dances a year.

"Banquet of Vultures," a business-suit-clad Death leads combatants to their doom.

Taylor steers clear of calling "Banquet of Vultures" a commentary on current events. He told the *Times* that he doesn't think the dance has to speak specifically to a particular situation. He had hoped it would be seen as universal.

Sandwiched on the program between the polar opposites of "Aureole" and "Banquet of Vultures" are two other works. The first is 1975's "Esplanade," a work celebrated for "its sheer physicality and exuberance," according to the book *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*.

"Troilus and Cressida (reduced)" is Taylor's 2006 take on Shakespeare's tragicomedy. Gia Kourlas of the *Times* called it a "sliver of hilarity." 10

White Bird presents PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY 7:30 p.m. Oct. 3 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, 1037 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$20-\$50 from 503-790-2787.

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