

RETHINKING DANCE

Pop Up Dance Boutique puts dance out on the streets

Dance is abstract and free-flowing by nature, yet access to it is often confined by class. It is for the affluent and cultured: neckties and pricey ticket stubs for an hour and a half of high-quality art.

Jana Meszaros is challenging the idea that a rich dance experience is a gift only to those who can afford it — as both artists and audience — with the contemporary dance troupe Pop Up Dance Boutique.

Meszaros and fellow Pop Up dancer Veronica DeWitt are both performers with DanceAbility, an international organization that hosts dancers of all physical abilities. The nonprofit was started in Eugene some 30 years ago.

The two dancers have taught and performed with the established troupe for several years, and Meszaros says that the accessibility-based ethic of DanceAbility was a large part of her initial inspiration for Pop Up Dance Boutique.

“There’s a lack of accessible venues for emerging artists in this city,” Meszaros says. “A lot of venues require quite a bit of base funds to get you in the door. We can’t just go and rent the Hult Center every time we have a piece that we want to show people.”

Since earning a bachelor’s degree in dance at the University of Oregon in 2009, Meszaros has found that while producing consistent work, the cost of being an artist restricts her ability to share her work. She and three fellow UO-educated dancers (Mariah Melson, Hannah Andersen and Dakota Bouher) created Pop Up Dance Boutique in response to that obstacle.

Now they rehearse in places like the EWEB College Hill Reservoir as opposed to renting a studio for \$20 an hour.

The unhindered nature of pop-up dance means it can be performed without a studio space, stage or equipment. It is contemporary dance that performers share throughout different environments and modes of delivery — with or without music.

Contemporary dance itself, Meszaros explains, is a form of rebellion against classical, vigorously strict dance styles such as ballet. “Everyone shows up, does their bit and then we pack up and take off,” she says. “It’s more of a dance gallery than a full evening at the show.”

Time and space do not equal quality, Meszaros says. Each Pop Up show runs for 20 minutes and features two to four dancers. The performances take as much planning, rehearsal time and dedication as those intended for a formal theater — a process that each dancer has spent years perfecting.

The show is rich, Meszaros says, but it may just be presented in an alley. “During the winter, we would find a street lamp, and the pool of light it created was our stage.”

The techniques of modern and contemporary dance, as performed in a more formal setting like a theater, also come to bear on Pop Up Dance Boutique performances. “Dance is not a spoken form,” DeWitt says. “It’s witnessing being in space. This space is going to look different than if I’m over here.”

Meszaros explains that rewriting the narrative of a dance by changing the context evokes a curiosity in the audience that is necessary for a creative community.

“Culturally, socially and linguistically, it inspires people,” she says. “Even if you don’t like what we’re doing or it’s not your cup of tea, I think that Eugene puts a lot of

JANA MESZAROS
PERFORMING AT
HI-FI MUSIC HALL



pride in the fact that we’re a creative, supportive community. This fits in with that philosophy.”

Pop Up Dance Boutique is still fresh — only two and a half years in the making. During that time, the group has performed with a slew of local artists and in various venues, most recently in the *Joy of Sex: A Celebration of Sexuality & Art* at Hi-Fi Music Hall.

The group will continue to perform bimonthly at curious and random locales with few props aside from their small title sign.

“If we can get our work out there and get it seen, that benefits us as artists because it’s a part of our process to show things and grow from it,” Meszaros says. “The mission is simply to put dance in more places — to see dance as something more than what you go to the theater for.” ■

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