

Judy Dworin Dance Celebrating 25 Years With Updated 'Lighthouse'



The Judy Dworin's dance company rehearses an updated "Lighthouse," which will be performed April 17 and 18 at the Wadsworth Atheneum as part of its 25th anniversary celebration.

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Special to The Courant

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The lighthouse provides muse for Judy Dworin dance company's 25th anniversary

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They drag their weary bodies onto the shore with the help of a rope, thrown by the lighthouse keeper, whose task is to be the steady light, the firm hand that defies their fated drowning.

He first appears on a ladder, representing the symbolic lighthouse that serves as a metaphor in Judy Dworin Performance Project's latest multi-media work, "Lighthouse," which will be performed April 17-18 at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Aetna Theater.

It is significant that Dworin, professor of theater and dance at **Trinity College**, has re-worked this early piece with commissions by poet Marjorie Agosin and composer Robert Een to celebrate her 25th anniversary of the Judy Dworin Performance Project.

Lighthouses represent wisdom, and hold an allure for Dworin, who recalls a fascination with them from childhood.

"I do think there is a mystique and magic about them — these edifices that provide light in the dark. I've dealt with the darker side of human nature and how we can move from that so in many ways the lighthouse is a kind of emblem for me, it's kind of a signature of what I've tried to do in my own work."

Seven dancers emerge from the darkness, seeking light and sanctuary, which are granted. Yet they are stranded from their technology, and must now connect with each other now that the gadgets that buffered human interaction are no more.

"They arrived

And nobody knew why they came to the island,

Why they fled tiny gadgets directing the velocity of time

And now seemed like sleepwalking birds

moving in dreams toward the seashore.

Maybe they brought with them the vigor of envy

and came in search of a strand of light."

"They've come from a world, our world, where they don't have much connection to other people, or nature. "They are shipwrecked and they struggle to reconnect with each other again," said Dworin, whose set is sparse, save for light, moveable ladders and giant nets that are hurled to suggest things such as undulating waves. Dworin, after much discussion, did include some large cellphones the dancers have, which of course are not working.

The theme of connection was one that first inspired Dworin to create her first piece on lighthouses shortly after the death of her father and prior to the formation of JDPP.

First performed in Hartford, Dworin then was invited to re-stage it in Baltimore, where she auditioned dancers. The process, which afforded less opportunity to improvise, lead Dworin to realize she needed her own company. This new version, which has been in the works for a year and a half, keeps the concepts of connection, but not probing loss, said Dworin. While some of the text remains, the movement, text and poetry, all make this a very new work, as does the haunting score by composer Robert Een, who is also the cellist and vocalist during the performance.

"I was very interested in developing the piece with an original score," said Dworin, whose vision was to build a piece then have the music and text enrich the dance.

Lisa Matias has been with the JDPP since its inception and dances in "Lighthouse."

"Having him there is amazing," Matias said of Een. "When he comes, it changes the way we move, one of the most important layers is what he created to support what we are doing and it's really quite beautiful."

Coming Full Circle

Dworin noted that much of her earlier work had original scores, something that hit home, especially as she went through the archival material that is part of an exhibit around her 25th year, titled "Resounding Images." The retrospective features costumes, set elements and posters and will be up at the Pump House Gallery, Bushnell Park until May 28.

Matias recalls being a freshman student at Trinity when she saw the original "Lighthouse."

"I didn't come from a modern dance background so I remember being very fascinated and moved by the whole thing. This incarnation is different, but the themes are the same," observed Matias, who feels that performing in the new "Lighthouse" is like coming full circle.

"Lighthouses really do kind of embody all the good things about humankind because they are beacons of hope and trust, and people trying to help each other and find a way when lost."

And while the dance moves from playful type duets to ones where the dancers succumb to the corrosive elements of jealousy, or envy, the work, said Dworin, doesn't take a didactic stance.

"'Lighthouse' doesn't end with a solution but is kind of a statement about life's process, and reminding us of it. The constancy of change, and how we find a connection in that...it allows people to connect with it in their own way, to place themselves in that world and find their own way through."

"LIGHTHOUSE" will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, April 17 and 18, at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Aetna Theater, 600 Main St., Hartford. Tickets are \$25; 15 for "Let's Go Arts" members and seniors; \$10 for students. Tickets at jdpplighthouse.bpt.me, judydworin.org and 860-527-9800.

On opening night, Friday, April 17, at 6:30 p.m., Erin Monroe, assistant curator of American Painting and Sculptor at Wadsworth, will give a talk on Edward Hopper's watercolor of "Captain Strout's House, Portland Head," which depicts a lighthouse attached to his residence. Following the performance Marjorie Agosin will sign copies of her new collection of poetry inspired by her collaboration with Dworin for "Lighthouse."

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Judy Dworin Performance Project shines light on human relationship with technology



Performers depict “Lighthouse’s” cast of characters, who are stranded on an island after a rough trip at sea. (Courtesy Miceli Productions)

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Amy J. Barry (mailto:(Unknown address)), Special to The Day

The iconic lighthouse holds a lot of meaning for Judy Dworin, director of the Judy Dworin Performance Project. The award-winning organization examines social contemporary issues through movement-based, multi-arts works on stage, in schools, and in prison communities, including the successful “Bridging Boundaries” outreach program offered at Niantic’s York Correctional Institution for women since 2005.

A new work by Dworin titled “Lighthouse” is premiering April 17 and 18 at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, marking the 18th large-scale dance-theater work by the project’s ensemble, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary season.

“‘Lighthouse’ is a piece I originally made in 1986 after my dad died. He was a really important person in my life and family structure,” Dworin says. “The inspiration of that was ‘How do you stay connected to someone who is no longer physically present?’ The piece inspired me to create an ongoing performance ensemble.

“I really wanted to come back to that original point,” Dworin continues, “but to create it in a completely different way and to (focus) on where we are 25 years later. The theme is still of lighthouses as beacons that provide light in the darkness, but it’s really exploring where we are today in terms of technology. We’re living in a world driven by technology and the work is responding to the (question) of how we maintain human connection with each other and nature and the larger universe.”

Dworin observes that people feel a sense of nostalgia and sadness about lighthouses being replaced by automation and that somehow technology could render them obsolete.

“I think lighthouses have a kind of power because these edifices were built to do something good — help people find light in the dark,” Dworin says. “We have a sense of them as protectors and guides. They present a kind of constancy in the midst of tumultuous change. They represent safety and a kind of groundedness. And they’re also beautiful and have a connection to nature as beacons that exist within nature, as opposed to outside of it.”

Describing it as a modern-day fable, Dworin explains that there is a kind of loose narrative in the piece about people shipwrecked on an island that have to start from scratch, acclimating and adjusting to a situation without their mobile devices, which have been lost at sea.

“It explores their attempt to relate to each other without technological devices around them. And they’re not always successful,” she says. “The lighthouse keeper is the one who’s found that balance in nature and the world without technology. The piece is really about relationships and an underlying theme of love and respect — required in this world if we’re going to make it.”

The story is suggested both through movement and a narrative voice interjected at various times in the piece, Dworin explains.

“Marcella Oteiza, the set designer, has created these incredible moveable ladders that the dancers move with in a kind of hypnotic sway to give a sense of connection and balance,” she says. “There is also a very beautiful effect of ropes creating waves, nets used on boats, suggestive of many different things, and (such) magical elements (as a) mermaid that appears and becomes an ocean spirit.”

The rest of the creative team includes Kathy Borteck Gersten, associate artistic director; Robert Een, composer, cellist and vocalist, who will perform his original music live with Bill Ruyle, hammer dulcimer player and percussionist; Marjorie Agosin, poet; and Blu, lighting designer.

Without giving away the ending, Dworin says there is a sadness about it, but also a hopefulness.

“We would love to bring this piece to New London,” Dworin says. “We’re hoping shoreline communities will welcome this piece because it speaks to something that lives in their midst.”

Dworin recalls going to Guthrie Beach as a young child and seeing New London Harbor Light — the oldest and tallest lighthouse in Connecticut — her earliest connection with lighthouses.

“That was my first inspiration and it really stayed with me,” she says.

PERFORMANCE DETAILS

“Lighthouse” by Judy Dworin Performance Project premieres on April 17 and 18 at 7:30 p.m. at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art’s Aetna Theater, 600 Main St., Hartford.

Opening night will be “book ended” by two special events. Erin Monroe, assistant curator of American painting and sculpture, will give a talk on Edward Hopper and lighthouses — a favorite subject of the American realist painter. Following the performance, Marjorie Agosin will sign copies of her new collection of poetry inspired by her collaboration with Dworin on “Lighthouse.”

General admission is \$25; seniors and “Let’s Go Arts” members, \$15; and students with ID, \$10. To purchase tickets call (860)527-9800 or visit www.jdpplighthouse.bpt.me (<http://www.jdpplighthouse.bpt.me>) or www.judydworin.org (<http://www.judydworin.org>).

