

PERFORMANCE MIX FESTIVAL, NOW IN ITS 24th YEAR

by MJ Thompson

A model of survival in good times and bad, the Performance Mix Festival returns in its 24th incarnation to New York this April, despite a recession that's meant cutbacks this year of about \$7000. "For a festival our size, that's a lot of moneys," says producer/curator and New Dance Alliance Director Karen Bernard. Never mind. This year's event brings together a raucous mix of over 30 artists, known and unknown, with an emphasis on the interdisciplinary and the in-between, and continues to hone its service mission of providing rehearsal space, marketing help and chances for networking and touring.

"People look at what we're doing this year," says Bernard, "and say it looks so much bigger. It's about the same amount of days but I think it's richer in terms of diversity, in terms of where people are coming from, their backgrounds...people from across the United States, Canada and Europe. Geographically, it's expanded. And it's more substantial, in terms of being able to show artists from away and artists from here and being able to have them communicate with each other."

Presentation highlights for 2010 include the New York-based choreographer Alexandra Beller, with a solo about creativity and motherhood entitled *Egg*. Says Beller, "I made *Egg* in 2008, when my boy had almost turned two, looking back at my first year of motherhood. There is, for me, a lot of conflict and inner turmoil to find balance between the selfishness of making art and the selflessness of being a mom...That edge of conflict brought up some really important issues...It's something we all need to resolve as artists: that sense that our choice to make art is a valuable choice in our lives, forgetting the larger world. I also think most mothers who work have some pain and guilt attached to the act of leaving, but owning, forgiving, even believing in, the choice to walk out the door is critical for our own health and sanity." Other local performers include the choreographer Malcolm Low; cabaret artist Yozmit; and Jody Sperling's Time Lapse Dance.



la chambre blanche (recreation 2008).
Photo by Ginette Laurin.

An especially large contingent from Montreal will be on hand, including popular nose-thumber collective GravelArtGroup (GAG); and coming-up Z THE ADDED VALUE. Both include former-dancers with Dave St-Pierre, a choreographer whose success and formidable talent have unleashed a wave of creative output and a brash new aesthetic in the city. But fans of Montreal's historical genre of contemporary dance—defined by its intense physicality and super production values, shaped as much by gymnastics, film, and nationalist politics as by specific dance techniques—will want to check out new presentations by Ginette Laurin. Laurin is one of the original inventors of *la scène Québécoise* and the artistic director of O Vertigo Danse. Now in her 50s, she has begun working in film and will show *Coppia 2* (2008), a short meditation on inherited movement patterns; and *la chambre blanche* (2008), a longer film based on the iconic O Vertigo work by the same name.

"Film doesn't replace the stage for me," says Laurin. "The main thing remains live performance. But sometimes it's nice to go deeper into the details or state of mind of the choreography." *Coppia 2*, which follows the same choreography set on a parent and his or her child, is part of Laurin's ongoing research into identity and the double. "I'm fascinated by how people inhabit movement, to see how the physiognomy comes from and is affected by the same genes. For me, it's interesting to make these analyses, but in the final result it's not important that viewers do the same. The film has to stay poetic and people have to feel something but it's not important that they enter into my own exploration."

Laurin will be in New York for the screening of *la chambre blanche*, a danced portrait of madness and sanity. The original was choreographed in 1992, after a period of turmoil in the city when a gunman attacked and killed 14 women at l'École Polytechnique. When Laurin began reconstructing the piece for the stage in 2007, another shooting at a local college rocked the city for the second time. "I thought, that's sad, but why is it the same, all these years later? *la chambre* is exploring the fine line between being in control and losing control. We explore balance, mental and physical. And I thought, this subject still speaks."

The strong showing from Montreal is in part due to the festival's exchange program between artists in New York with those in Montreal and Philadelphia, in partnership respectively with Studio 303 and the Community Education Center. "We've been doing it for I don't know how long," says Bernard. "And so, even though artists will come and perform for like 15 minutes, maybe longer, the point is the Performance Mix isn't just a flash in the pan where they come and they perform and that's it: we provide free rehearsal time for people, we have the Breakfast Mix [with *la chambre blanche* screening and discussion with Ginette Laurin], which helps with networking; we're marketing people on our website, we're bringing people back to Montreal and Philadelphia and that helps with more bonding. We're trying to help their careers creatively and promotionally."