

THE DANCE ENTHUSIAST

Celebrating the Thirtieth Season of the Performance Mix Festival (Part I)



Karen Bernard. Photo by Paula Court/Courtesy of the Kitchen.

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Published on June 2, 2016

Founder Karen Bernard Takes the Festival Back to its Beginnings

Performance Mix Festival

Abrons Art Center

June 6-11, 2016

Tickets are \$20 (or free admission where indicated online) and can be purchased online at www.abronsartscenter.org or by calling 212-352-3101.

In its thirtieth season, New Dance Alliance's Performance Mix Festival features an eclectic group of artists, including the feminist acrobatic company LAVA, the 'docu-dance' artist Louise Moyes and the Daly Collective, and Japanese choreographer, Yasuko Yokoshi. This month, founder Karen Bernard takes the festival back to where it first began in 1986 at Henry Street Settlement's Abrons Art Center. Bernard has worked relentlessly to cultivate the festival and its impressive roster of artists all while raising a family, working various jobs, and choreographing her own work.

Since its inaugural season, the Performance Mix has expanded from a shared evening amongst peers to six days of numerous performances, panels, and special events featuring artists from Canada, Europe and the U.S. Guest curators reflect Bernard's diverse and unfettered tastes. Miriam Ginestier, director of Studio 303 in Montreal, is organizing an

evening of wild, feminist performance and video by artists from New York and Montreal. Musician, David Garland, tap artist, Roxane Butterfly, and contact improvisation masters, Tim O'Donnell and Sarah Young are heading up the program *Three Genres of Improvisation*.



Karen Bernard in *Footsteps on the...* (1992). Photo: Carolina Kroon

Growing up in the Marblehead, Massachusetts, Bernard studied dance in her family's barn, which served as a local studio. Her father, the late Steven Bernard, was her teacher who had performed with Charles Weidman. With students crossing through the family space, performance art was deeply engrained throughout Bernard's life.

Though she studied dance from a young age, Bernard dabbled outside of the field in visual art and video. Both mediums have permeated her dances over the years. "I always was drawn to making an environment for myself to be in," she says.

In 2014, Bernard revisited a series of self-choreographed solos she created between 1993-1996 setting them on other artists. Performer Jil Guyon will dance one of those solos, *Damn Your Eyes*, in the festival. "I don't often resemble the people that I inhabit in my work. I don't look feminine or masculine, but the character can be one of those extremes," Bernard says. "When I set this solo on Jil, I realized she looked like the fantasy -- very feminine and doesn't seem to age. But in fact this piece is about imperfection and vulnerability."



Karen Bernard in *Removed Exposure...* (2006). Photo: Sheilagh O'Neil

Bernard seeks artists who possess an element of rawness and audacity for her festival. “I think it’s a hoot,” she says of curation process. Previous festival programs offer an insight into her perceptive eye. A young Trajal Harrell danced with cassette tapes in an early piece; Keely Garfield flipped pancakes onstage; and the critically acclaimed Canadian choreographer Dana Michel was seen for the first time in New York before making a splash at the American Realness Festival.

Between fostering relationships with artists, organizing the festival and running her own studio space, Bernard continues to deepen her own work. “As I’ve gotten older, I’ve realized I can’t be as physical as I once was,” she says. “I never thought I was that virtuosic of a dancer. But when I look back at the works, I realized there was a lot of dancing.”

After the festival, she plans to explore some of her old dances that she is currently digitizing from video during an Emily Harvey Foundation Residency in Venice, Italy. But she isn’t planning on a rigid reconstruction; instead, she says, “I’ll let my mind wander and see what happens.”