

ALL FOR ONE

'Spring Fever' brings artists together at Brooklyn Lyceum



Dance 'Fever': Choreographer Josh Walden's "All is Full of Love," set to music by Bjork, will open the new "Spring Fever" fest.

By Paulanne Simmons
for The Brooklyn Papers

Two innovative Park Slope producers have created a "Spring Fever" that may prove to be contagious among fiscally challenged arts groups.

The difficulty of raising money to create and produce new work in the arts is legendary. Undaunted by the hurdles they faced, Tomi Tsunoda and Sharon Eisman, two New York University graduates, formed their own production company in September 2000.

This company, breedingground productions, uses a "time share" concept that allows artists to obtain the resources they need at minimal cost.

"Over the years and after many frustrations, we decided to create a company where poor, smart, passionate artists could do the things they wanted to. We set up an office in our [Park Slope] apartment and founded a company which allows collaborators to trade time for each others' productions," Eisman told GO Brooklyn.

This means, for example, that if a director works the box office in one show, he may collect enough time to get someone else to do the lights on his next show. Their upcoming multimedia arts festival, "Spring Fever" at the Brooklyn Lyceum, is a perfect example of how this system works.

"We wanted to produce our clown show, 'Blue: A Comedy About Death and Loss,' which we had workshopped at the Westbeth Theatre Center several times," Eisman explained. "We rented the Lyceum theater space for three weeks, and instead of letting it sit dark for those times when we weren't running our show, we decided to give other collaborators a chance to work on and produce projects they'd wanted to do for some time but couldn't due to financial limitations. We would provide the space, lights, publicity and staff. They would provide their brilliance, hard work and dreams."

The project now has 120 collaborators and the financial assistance or donated materials from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, off-off-Broadway's Chashama Theatre and DUMBO theater company One Arm Red.

"Spring Fever" opens May 21 with an evening of free drinks, free food and a free performance of choreographer Josh Walden's "All Is Full of Love" and continues until June 7 with two free art installations, five theatrical performances, three dance pieces and two

film events - all ongoing throughout the festival - as well as two live music events.

Walden has based "All Is Full of Love" on the musical "On the Town." Only instead of using the music of Leonard Bernstein, Walden choreographed to Icelandic pop singer Bjork.

"The music is electronic with lots of instruments," he says. "It's usually optimistic. It has a driving beat. It inspired me to want to choreograph this ballet based on the music."

Walden, who is currently dancing on Broadway in "42nd Street," uses the term "ballet" loosely.

"It's really a Gene Kelly, MGM ballet," he said.

Walden has also changed the story considerably. "All Is Full of Love" is not about three sailors on a one-day leave trying to find love in New York City before going off to war, but rather about three women who come to the Big Apple looking for fun but find something very different.

"The dance, an hour-long piece, three minutes of which premiered at the Palace Theatre in the Gypsy of the Year competition, which raises money for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, deals with difficult themes: infidelity, abuse and rape," said Walden.

"Blue: A Comedy About Death and Loss," written by Eisman and directed by Tsunoda is a mime comedy that follows an epic battle between the Grim Reaper and a cowgirl named Charlotte as they journey through five absurd fables about death. It is set to a soundtrack of music performed by an ensemble of actors and musicians who combine the styles of vaudeville, cartoon and silent film.

Among the music-makers of particular note is The Delphina Orchestra, a 16-piece ensemble under the direction of bandleader and composer Justin Mullens. The music morphs styles that range from the jazz of Ellington and Monk to the groundbreaking orchestration of Stravinsky to the atonal sounds of Schoenberg to the indefinable Frank Zappa.

Between shows, the audience can walk into a trolley on the Lyceum grounds and view the works of art commissioned for every window. Or they can walk into Cadmium County, the home of Noah Peepkin, a 2-inch-tall character created by Jeremy Bullis. The installation, 3,000 square feet of space on the lower level of the Lyceum, is called "Noah Knew He Liked Cadmium County for a Reason," and Bullis said it represents "a typical southern or Midwestern hill town from times past - with no TV or computers."

Two walls will be covered with hills, trees, flowers and buildings. All of the clay characters are 2 inches tall and the town, constructed of paper and matte board, is made to scale.

"Noah Peepkin is the main character in a series of sculptures I've done in the last year or so," said Bullis. "He's represented as a chicken-like character. He's kind of an outsider in the community he lives in, which is filled with larger-than-life eccentric characters. He's plain-looking and quiet. But he shares similar interests with the others, although he does a lot more observing than participating."

Peepkin is based on thumbprint drawings Bullis started doing when he was 7. These characters appeared in greeting cards and last year figured in a sculpture he gave his father for his 60th birthday.

Those who would like to get a preview of Cadmium County can visit www.jeremybullis.com.

Eisman said she chose the Lyceum to be the home of "Spring Fever" because it is in Park Slope where there are "so many artists traveling outside of their own community to produce and see work."

"Building and creating with one's community is essential to both the artist and the community's development," said Eisman. "We involve the community and let everyone see art, music, dance and theater."

Breedingground Productions' "Spring Fever" arts festival runs May 21-June 7 at the Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Ave., between Union and President streets. Doors open 6 pm to midnight, Tuesday through Friday, and noon to midnight, Saturday and Sunday. Tickets are \$12 per show, \$18 evening pass (3 shows), and \$25 weekend pass (6 shows plus lunch). Student discounts and group discounts are available. Ticket schedules and show descriptions available at www.breedingground.com or (347) 683-7698.

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