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DANCE

Moses' latest is taking it from the streets

'Bootstrap Tales' draws on experiences of foster youth and street musicians

By **Aimée Ts'ao**

Correspondent

Reading a novel can be a satisfying experience, but usually reveals little of the path the author traveled from his thoughts to the printed page. That history is more likely found through an interview, biography or by delving into the journals of the writer.

Discovering the journey of a choreographer is also not usually found by looking at his or her dances. The process is different because dance is not verbal. So let's look beneath the surface of choreographer and artistic director Robert Moses. His eponymous company, Robert Moses' Kin, will premiere his latest piece, "Bootstrap Tales," during the company's 23rd season, Friday through Sunday, at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts theater in San Francisco.

In the work, Moses uses the spirit of the company's new outreach initiative, The Bootstrap Program, which gives San Francisco foster youth an exposure to the arts and direct access to the skills and resources for creating a life in the arts. He also chose to develop the score with street musicians, who recorded material in the studio with musician and composer PC Munoz, who then mastered their work.

When asked what was the seed that sparked this piece, Moses says, "I don't really know. All the elements are so disparate. I used to write titles down in my notebooks and one of them was 'Bootstrap Tales' because somewhere over my last 23 years that idea had popped up, but I hadn't investigated it. Now it's the time to do it."

"This is my idea of some individual, a small group of people, but a support system isn't there for them, so they have to push forward and make something happen for themselves," Moses adds. "So much



VICTOR TALLEDOS—ROBERT MOSES' KIN

Members of Robert Moses' Kin rehearse "Bootstrap Tales," a work premiering Friday through Sunday at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

'BOOTSTRAP TALES'

World premiere dance by Robert Moses, presented by Robert Moses' Kin

When: 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday

Where: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 700 Howard St., San Francisco

Tickets: \$19-\$55, 415-978-2787, ybca.org, www.robertmoseskin.org

of what I do is drawn on the notion or foundation that we as people, we as citizens, we as Americans, are supposed to have a kind of responsibility to other people, but also to ourselves. And part of the responsibility to yourself is to be able to take yourself up by your bootstraps and move forward."

Watching a rehearsal is an even

broader window into Moses's process. In the space of an hour, the dancers go through most of the material that Moses had already created for "Bootstrap Tales." He stops periodically to tweak the steps themselves, smoothing out any awkward transitions or improving the line of the dancers' limbs.

Moses asks for different accents in the dancers' movements to better reflect or oppose the rhythmic complexity of the score, jumping to his feet and demonstrating what he wants himself in lieu of a lengthy explanation. There are more mundane problems to solve — where each dancer needs to enter and exit after their turns on stage to avoid collisions with other dancers.

Moses requests subtle nuances in the execution of the steps. Later, he explains, "The dancer part of

dancing is sensation. The artist part is about realization. The dancer thinks 'how does it feel; the artist thinks 'how do I shape it.'"

During the rehearsal, Moses puts a line of seven dancers across the back of the performing space, behind a solo dancer. First he pairs them off and has them change places with each other. With each iteration — and there are at least half a dozen — the movements become more defined, larger, more varied in speed or movement quality, until it's a veritable dance in itself. Imagine watching a time-lapse film of a crystal growing or a flower blooming. Later, I learn he cut the segment because it didn't contribute to the overall idea of the piece.

"The thing about 'Bootstrap' is there is a lot of information to deal with, to look at. It's about how

these men and women deal with space in the streets. For some, it's just by being themselves. They don't know how to manage people and others walk over them. Some define the space by putting themselves up in a particular area — they shape their space and their relationship with people in it," Moses says.

He continues, "Part of the problem is leaving the authenticity in the work. Leaving the moroseness, leaving the effort, leaving the sense of abandonment, loneliness or desperation in terms of moving something forward."

But despair is not the central theme.

"I really want the work to be upbeat and positive," he says. "I don't tend to think there is melancholy or a twist to the work. There is something that pulls it up."