

**SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL
FORT MASON, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
MAY 25 THROUGH JUNE 4, 2017**

EVE MUTSO in *UNKNOWN*

May 27 at 8 pm and May 28 at 2 pm at the Cowell Theater

Since 2003, the San Francisco International Arts Festival has been bringing a broad range of theater, music and dance from around the world to the Bay Area. Unless you have a lot of disposable income and can fly around the globe to see these performers in their home countries, the Festival offers an easy way to experience these exceptional artists at Fort Mason in San Francisco, along with our own local talent. Now in its 14th season, the SFIAF's artistic director Andrew Wood, has curated an eleven-day run, with an emphasis on Asian companies in all three disciplines. (For complete listings see www.sfiaf.org/2017.)

Due to a fortuitous coincidence, I was able to interview Estonian dancer Eve Mutso two weeks ago in Berkeley where she appeared as a guest artist with the Scottish Ballet in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. With her interpretation of Blanche DuBois, Mutso proved to be an exquisite classical dancer and a compelling dramatic actor. After several performances in Los Angeles in that iconic role, she returns to San Francisco in her own contemporary choreography, *Unknown*, appearing on Saturday, May 27 at 8 pm and Sunday, May 28 at 2 pm, at the Cowell Theater.

Mutso says she began “folk dancing and gymnastics when I was young, but still had too much energy so my mum decided maybe I should take ballet classes to normalize my activity levels. I was ten when I went to Tallinn Ballet School and graduated in 1999 and joined the Estonian National Ballet.” When the Scottish Ballet auditioned for new dancers in 2003, she was hired and remained there for thirteen years before retiring from the company last year. “But then they brought *Streetcar* back into the repertoire,” she recounts, “and invited me to be a guest artist for this tour.”

When asked how she started choreographing on herself, she replies, “I've been creating my own work for the last three years, but it's been for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in smaller venues. I felt that the time was right for me to face my future as a freelance dancer and choreographer. I just felt the momentum and it was the right time for me to step away from a big institution and invest my time and energy into collaborations. Those artists were already there, but I was waiting to have the time to work with them.”

Mutso has found inspiration in many ways and she elaborated, “Over the years I find myself still discovering my language and what my choreography is. In a way, I am dancing the ghosts of all the choreographers I ever danced. It's a medley, it's a mix of all the styles of the the narrative and abstract ballets I have danced. They have settled in me. I do have my own force, but I think it's the mix of everything I have experienced.”

When responding to the question of which specific choreographers or dance companies have been influential she says, “I hugely admire William Forsythe's choreography and the essence of the ideas in his work, but also Ashley Page who was my first director at the Scottish Ballet. He had an edgy, rich way of pushing your body past the classical shapes. He really nurtured

my talent and made me grow and made me aware of what the dance world really is out there. All the choreographers he brought in had something to say and spoke a language which I understood.”

About her own choreography, she explains, “My works so far have been quite personal. My first work was *e/Even* and it was done with my set designer Matthew Strachan and my sound designer Merlin Bonning. It was all about what it would be like to be inside a dancer's body. So Merlin put contact microphones on me and we recorded my heartbeat, my breathing, my spine clicking, my pointe shoes in the rosin box, everything a dancer goes through while performing. The score for it was just sounds of me. It was again something I had to go through in order to take myself to the next level of self-discovery and self-manifesting.”

Mutso continues with a description of her current piece, “*Unknown* is my first piece after leaving Scottish Ballet and it directly talks about the unknown. Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties. I see life itself full of uncertainties. That was a huge inspiration for me, stepping out of that known and safe environment, facing and building my future as an individual. Letting go of that frame of mind that has supported and controlled my development. All of us are in constant change and life is about moving on. Hopefully the audience can relate to that state of mind – stepping out and sensing and trusting yourself to be okay.

“It's a fifteen minute solo that's really a collaboration between Matthew – the set and lighting designer, Merlin – the sound designer who I commissioned to create the score, and myself. It's a triangle of talents and it's been a real team effort to bring this to life.

Strachan offers details about the development of *Unknown*, “Eve had a very strong idea in mind of what she wanted and the look she was going for. The idea was for a structure in the shape of a triangle. We spoke at length about it – would it be a solid structure, something that just sat there, a cage? But the problem is how do you get it on stage. Then she brought her daughter's little plastic toy and turned it on end which gave us the whole shape we were looking for. I looked at it and thought I know how I could do it – I should make this thing fly. Hide the whole structure away so that when the audience comes in, the house lights will go out and they'll be completely unaware that there is a structure waiting to come in.

“The whole thing isn't solid, Eve can interact with it as it's all around her. How do I light this, how do I get light to concentrate on the person inside, basically to isolate light? We designed the shape of it, still a triangle, and put the light inside it, so it's all nicely hidden. Then we used a remote control dimmer, so the whole thing stands alone. We can even change the colors without any wires. When Eve steps out of it, it becomes lifeless and when she's in it, it warms. We can also manipulate the shape into a diamond shape that's suspended and it's still present and she can see it, like a frame of mind, and at the end when we fade to black, it disappears. It's magic.”