

DANCE

Scott Wells celebrates 25 years of bold, 'super physical' artistry

SF choreographer joins with longtime collaborator on anniversary shows

By **Aimée Ts'ao**
Correspondent

Twenty-five years seems like an eternity when you are young, but looking back from midlife, it seems like yesterday.

But instead of wondering how a quarter-century went by in a flash, two acclaimed Bay Area choreographers are celebrating their years in San Francisco with a dance program titled "On the Occasion of our 25th Anniversary (and eviction)." In a particular piece, the choreographers, longtime collaborators and former romantic partners Kathleen Hermesdorf and Scott Wells, ask: "Was That Good for You?" The piece makes its premiere as part of Scott Wells & Dancers' new season being performed over the next two weekends.

Between rehearsals at Dance Mission Theater, Hermesdorf and Wells discuss the pair's quarter-century, surrounded by a plethora of colorful props and costumes for the upcoming shows.

Prompted to recount their history of artistic endeavors, Wells says, "It's not our 25 years. We started together, then ..."

Hermesdorf interjects, "We'd converge, diverge, converge, diverge."

They first met in graduate school at the University of Illinois. Hermesdorf says, "I fell in love with his work. The first piece I danced was



DAVID PAPAS — SCOTT WELLS & DANCERS

Kellye McGee and Rajendra Serber perform "Parkour Deux," a Scott Wells piece being revived for a 25th anniversary program starting Friday night at Dance Mission Theater.

called 'The Blindness of Our Affection.' I was moving in this new way and thinking this is how I was built to move, this is what I was born to do. I remember being extremely ecstatic. I had been doing Merce Cunningham technique and ballet, but this was so free, we were just throwing ourselves around, hair down, tresses flying."

After earning their master's degrees in fine arts in 1991, they came to the Bay Area. "I was driving across the country with my ex-boyfriend," recounts Hermesdorf. "We stopped in Reno and he lost all his money gambling. So I paid his way the rest of the trip and he dropped me off at my new boyfriend's place." She and Wells (the new beau) then moved in together with fellow grad school dancers with whom they had already started a company.

Wells says, "I'll try to say this as humbly as possible. We really did start off with a bang. That's because we already had some repertory

and we were super physical and fresh."

"He was so bold," Hermesdorf continues, "he came into town before I did, getting to know everyone and inviting them to our show. There used to be dance critics then. I think we got five reviews for our first show at Theatre Artaud and that put us on the map right away."

It was equally crucial that right away they moved the company into DanceGround Keriak, where they had affordable rehearsal space for 25 years. Increased rents and space shortages caused by gentrification have driven out artists of all stripes in the past two decades. It was only a year ago that Wells' company and other dancers were forced from their space through an Ellis Act eviction. Wells' company is now in residence at CounterPulse's new Tenderloin venue.

The duo stayed together romantically for a year, then remained artistically linked for four more.

SCOTT WELLS & DANCERS

Performing "On the Occasion of our 25th Anniversary (and eviction)," featuring Kathleen Hermesdorf

When: 8 p.m. Friday, Saturday, Dec. 7-9; 4 p.m. Dec. 10

Where: Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th St., San Francisco

Tickets: \$18-\$28; brown-papertickets.com

"In 1994 at ODC Theater, our last piece together was 'Collision of Course,'" Wells recalls. "Now we're doing a remake of this tape-measure piece. I thought it would be really cool to work with Kathleen again."

Hermesdorf adds, "It's nice for me to be included in the history of it, too, because it's so easy to erase it or rewrite it or forget that there was someone else involved. I think I was so influenced by his aesthetic and I think I influenced his as well."

A revival of Wells' "Ballistic" is also on the program. The award-winning work belongs to a group of his pieces that utilize sports — "Parkour Deux," "Boxing with Mozart," "Rocky vs. Baryshnikov" and his skateboarding *pièce de résistance*, "One Fell Swoop."

"I love objects flying in the air," Wells says. "I want to track them. So I always wanted to work with balls. Making 'Ballistic' and 'Parkour' was a turning point. I'd come to rehearsal and wouldn't say anything and the dancers were going crazy with the equipment, making up the funnest stuff. It was a much better way to source material than trying to do everything myself."