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## DANCE

## SF Ballet set to roll out 12 new works

The company's Unbound Festival taps some top choreographers

By Aimée Te'ao  
Correspondent

Ten years ago, in celebration of San Francisco Ballet's 75th anniversary, artistic director Heigi Tomasson ambitiously commissioned dances from 10 choreographers to showcase in the New Works Festival. It was a break from the norm, since the company usually presents just two or three freshly minted ballets each season from in-house dance-makers and invited guest choreographers.

A decade on, Tomasson has decided again to pull out the stops, as the company offers brand-new work from 12 artists, who come from just a few blocks away to as far away as Europe. The aptly named Unbound Festival runs at the War Memorial Opera House April 20 through May 6.

The range of choreographers is astounding to find all in one place: Akonzo King, artistic director of Lines Ballet for 35 years; Justin Peck and Myles Thatcher, who are still dancing in the New York City Ballet and S.F. Ballet, respectively; Christopher Wheeldon, who is creating his 10th work for S.F. Ballet; and David Dawson, Cathy Marston, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Dwight Rhoden and King, who are all premiering their first pieces for the company (though they have all created a prolific amount of work for other companies around the world).

Scheduling a festival with 12 choreographers, for a company that also per-



Choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa rehearses her Picasso-themed work "Guernica," which will debut at the Unbound Festival. "We're making a cubist painting of a cubist painting," she says.

forms its own full season, is daunting. An ingenious solution was dividing the company into three groups, with each learning four of the new works during the summer rehearsal period.

Houston Ballet artistic director Stanton Welch, whose "Bespoke" will premiere during the festival, was looking forward to the creative energy at the event.

"It will be an interesting time to have these choreographers all together, feeling unbound because we aren't restricted by where we work or our responsibilities as directors," he said. "It's just about creation."

King may beg to differ, as his own company was preparing for its spring season a mere two weeks before he premieres his "The Col-

lective Agreement" at Unbound.

All choreographers have their unique way of conceptualizing ideas and developing a process to nurture those seeds into finished dance productions.

Edwaard Liang's "The Infinite Ocean" was inspired by the passing of a friend. The resulting ballet, he says, "is about people transitioning, letting go of their earthly dramas, relationships and what I consider how people truly let go."

Dawson felt that his career as a dancer was preparation for being a choreographer, citing the inspiration of dancing to works of Frederick Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan, Hans van Manen and William Forsythe.

"I quit dancing when I was 29 and since have moved into my own voice," he says. "All the people I worked with are going to echo through my imagination. I have developed a kind of lyricism for myself. It's more important to create beauty in the world than to give up on it."

On the other hand, about his "Let's Begin at the End," Rhoden says, "My work is very physical, very technical, a lot of details, complexity. Definitely classical technique but with a freedom in the upper body, more mobile, more free."

"Working with new dancers in new places really brings out something in me. I love working collaboratively. I don't mean I let the dancers make up the steps, I

mean I let them know they have the power to influence the direction and participate in how we get where we're going."

The narrative ballet "Snowblind," by Marston, is based on the Edith Wharton novella "Ethan Frome." The love triangle tale is set in wintry New England.

"It's very snowy, it's cold, it's bleak, so I wanted to find a way in movement to convey this elemental feel," Marston said. "We've got a group of people who are the snow. Snow can have different qualities, it can be light and playful and beautiful and seductive and fascinating. It can beat at you and sting. And it can also be very claustrophobic and heavy and smother you. So we're using the qualities of snow to

## UNBOUND FESTIVAL

Presented by San Francisco Ballet, featuring new works by 12 choreographers

When: April 20-May 6

Where: War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco

Tickets: \$29-\$365, 415-865-2000, www.sfballet.org/unbound

amplify the emotional story that's going on between the three characters."

Wheeldon says his new work, "Bound To," "is the first ballet that I'm making in flat shoes, partly because the theme of the underlying narrative needs to be more grounded and human. The overarching theme is the disconnectedness of our time, how we are perhaps even more connected with our devices than we are with each other."

Lopez Ochoa's "Guernica," a take on themes of war and sensuality in Picasso's paintings, is enhanced through costumes by Mark Zappone. "He's going to take a painting by Picasso and print it on Lycra, then he's making leotards from that so that someone wears a part of the painting," Lopez Ochoa said. "Sometimes I have moments when they come together. We're making a cubist painting of a cubist painting."

The choices in music also reflect a vast range from Bach to Björk and in between: Amy Beach, Arthur Foote, Philip Feeney, Arvo Pärt, Philip Glass, John Adams, Michael Nyman, Ezio Bosso, M83 and Michel Banabila, Chris Garneau, Keaton Henson and two commissioned scores from Jason Moran and Oliver Davis.

In other words, there is something for everyone at the Unbound Festival.