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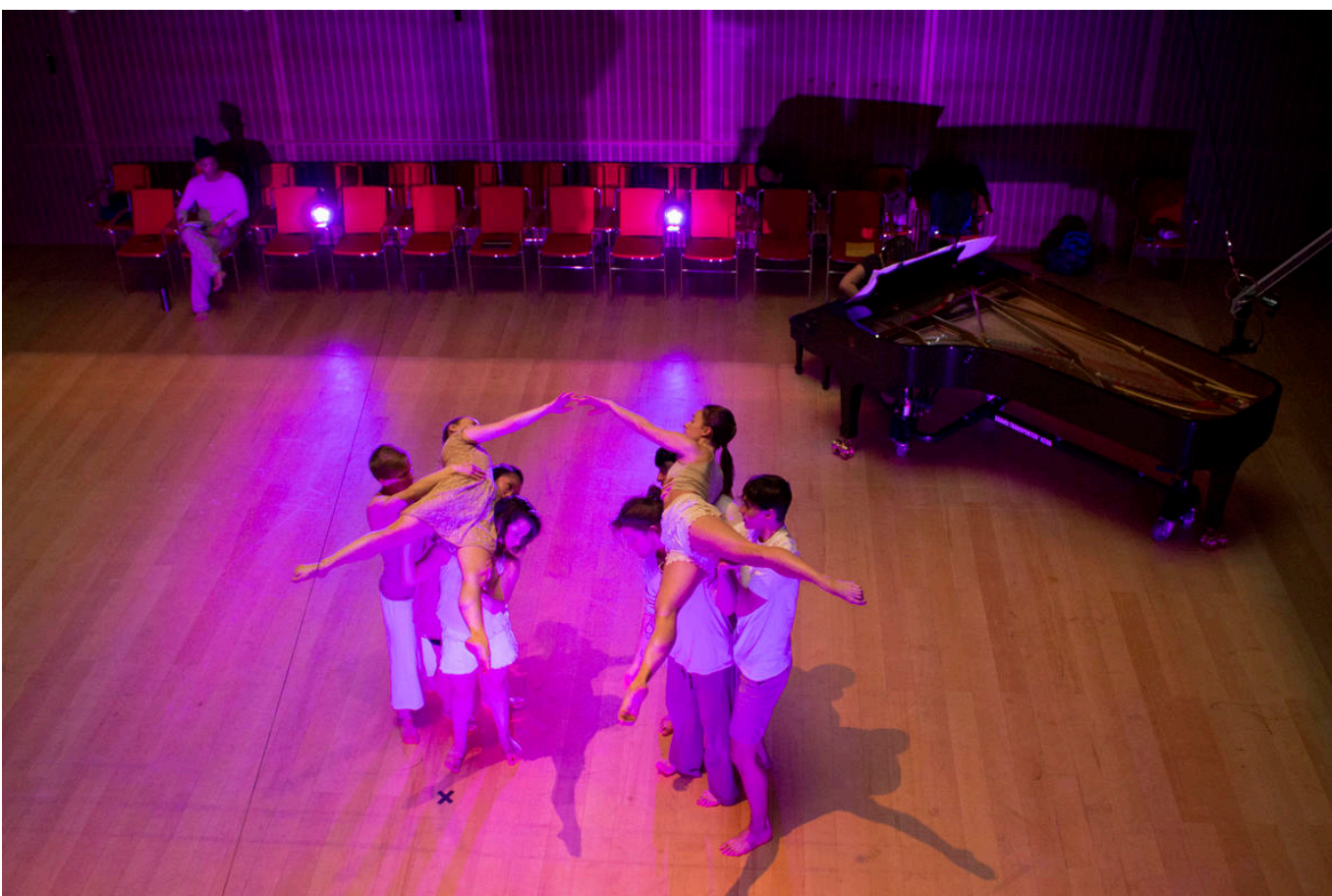
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Bringing dance back to the Gardner

Kristen Giddings Wednesday, March 16, 2016



Credit: Unknown

Photo by Sarah Whiting

COMMENTS

Before Betsi Graves even moved to Boston, she dreamed of dancing at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Spurred on by her first visit to the city in 1999, she fell in love with the magic of the museum, as well as the history and legacy of Gardner herself.

As anyone who has had the privilege to journey through the museum hallways and courtyards understands, Graves fell captive to the beauty. And everywhere she looked, she saw dance.

Dance was a vibrant piece of the museum history and of Gardner herself, who supported early modern dancers such as Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Dennis, who visited the museum for inspiration. These pioneers of modern dance did the unthinkable: they danced in bare feet, and broke free from traditional and classical pieces. Gardner took a risk in supporting this new and provocative genre.

Now, over a decade after her initial spark, Graves has realized her dreams. As the Director of Urbanity Dance, the growing-with-force dance company out of South Boston, Graves brings her company to Calderwood Hall at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on March 17, as a part of the museum's Third Thursdays series.

Graves describes the death of dance beyond classical in Boston

"The Gardner is going back into the original traditions of Isabella supporting modern dance and Boston as a city is getting behind that too," said Graves. "For years, I feel like there wasn't a strong alternative to classical [dance], and now there's this emergence of modern dance. I think this performance at the Gardner could reflect that. It's interesting that everything is new again."

Mayor Martin Walsh acknowledges this struggle himself, as he begins efforts to invest in the arts for Boston, rolling out a \$1 million plan for arts funding and several new grants and art initiatives in the city.

So while this performance by Urbanity at the Gardner is a dream realized for Graves, it also reflects the re-emergence modern dance has been making in The Hub.

And what a better way to celebrate the art form – and as a more artistic alternative to St. Paddy's Day festivities – than to experience the museum and this performance for yourself.

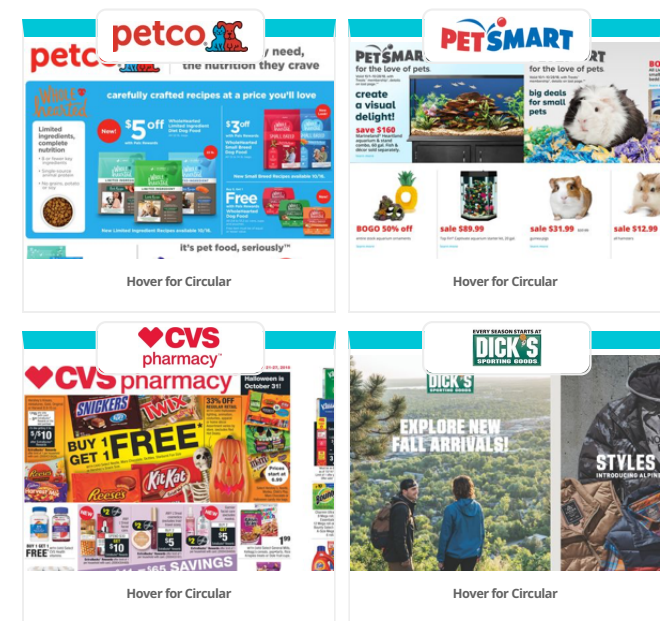
"The ambience of the Gardner is just unbelievable, it's a space like no other in the world," said Jessie Smith, Director of Program Planning at the Gardner. "And the museum at night is just magical, so then to have it activated through programming, like dance for example, is just a really unique experience"

Smith is excited to see what Graves and her dancers create for the performance in Calderwood Hall. The architecture of the hall, where audience members are seated on one level of a three-tier balcony, all overlooking the stage, allows for an entirely new experience for even a seasoned theatergoer.

"I envisioned doing something completely different with perspective, with the dancers lying on the ground and the audience viewing from above," said Graves. "So that for me was really inviting a lot of geometric imagery and playing with angles of dancers. I am really interested in playing with human connection, but in a really kind of awkward, flat-lined, one-dimensional way."

Don't expect to see any traditional jumps or turns in this performance. As a result of her surroundings and the audience's view, Graves created a whole new way of moving, specific for the exquisite architecture.

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The evening also offers music in the courtyard, dancers moving throughout the gravel pathways of courtyard, gallery activities, and an opportunity to sketch in response to a live dancer.

Smith quotes words from Gardner's will that she often takes into account in developing programming for the museum: "Isabella Stewart Gardner created the museum for the education and enjoyment of the public forever."

"Third Thursdays and this performance in particular really speak to both of those ideas, education and enjoyment. We're really inspired by the incredible legacy of Isabella Stewart Gardner and how we can really connect with creative thinkers today."

And Graves thrives on those connections as well, continuing to work together to build a strong art culture in Boston.

"I think Urbanity is all about collaboration in this amazing city of eccentrics and artists and art supporters."

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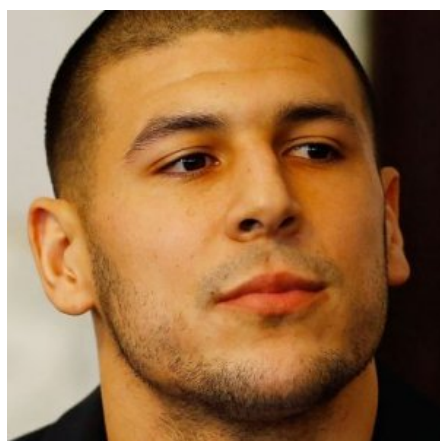
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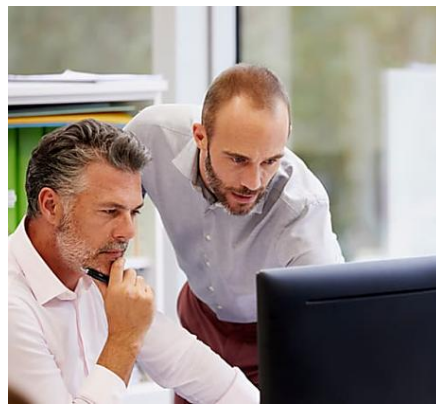
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