

# Choreography as Oracle: The Works of Delfos Danza Contemporánea

By Alysia Scott



Delfos Danza Contemporánea by Lois Greenfield

Nestled in the southern slopes of Mount Parnassos in Greece rests a site renowned throughout the ancient Greek world. Delphi is the site of the Pythian Apollo sanctuary where, from approximately 1400 B.C. to 381 A.D., the ancient Greek oracle Pythia was found serving as a medium for those who made the journey to receive Apollo's prophetic visions. People then traveled long distances to more deeply understand themselves, their relations to others and the future. This site, its history and purpose led to the name and mission of one of the most important dance companies in Latin America, **Delfos Danza Contemporánea**.

In 1992, Mexican choreographers and accomplished dancers, Victor Manuel Ruiz and Claudia Lavista founded Delfos Danza Contemporánea. That same year, the company was awarded first prize in the National Contemporary Dance Contest of Mexico. Six years later, Delfos was invited to relocate from Mexico City to Mazatlán, Mexico to become the resident dance company of the Angela Peralta Theater, and founded the Mazatlán Professional School of Contemporary Dance, now considered to be one of the best schools for professional dance studies in Mexico and Latin America. Internationally known, students from across the globe come to the school.

At the core of Delfos' work, both professionally and academically, is a belief in dance as a medium of discovery and choreography as a process likened to that of consulting an oracle. Claudia Lavista explains, "Choreographing for us is like consulting an oracle that reveals new answers. It also reveals new questions. It deals with the eternal game of recognizing oneself and the rest of humanity through a mirror of water that connects us to the interior world."

Delfos works closely together year-round, in support of deepening their internal dialogue, their encounters with each other and the exchange with audiences that experience their provocative language of dance. Lavista adds, "In order to speak to someone, first you have

to speak to yourself. First you need to be in touch with yourself before you can be in touch with anybody else." Delfos' touch is aggressive, yet intimate and gentle. Wrapped in a physical prowess that is at once technically fierce and vulnerably human, to experience the company's work is to become closer to personal and shared aspects of human nature.

At The Dance Center, the company will present the Midwest premiere of *Rincones de Luz (Corners of Light)*, a program of five works choreographed by four different choreographers. Each piece presents a corner of light within the choreographer's and dancers' imaginations and personal experience, like a labyrinth of human emotion vaporized in suggestive and dreamy atmospheres. The dances, as poetry, are woven with movement, light, words and sound. As a guide to the soul threshold of each piece in *Rincones de Luz*, Claudia Lavista offered reflections on each of the works:

1. In *Nissi Dominus*, choreographed by Omar Carrum to music by Antonio Vivaldi, Carrum wanted to be connected to each dancer's soul, delving deep into their psyches to understand them as passageways to different emotional states and ages of people, searching for a confession.

2. In *Solo y Mi Alma (Alone and My Soul)*, choreographed by Claudia Lavista to music by Meredith Monk, a man seeks to discover the energy and impulses inside of him that move him and inform his decisions.
3. In *La Frontera de Mi Piel (The Borders of My Skin)*, choreographed by Xitlali Piña to music by Michael Gordon, Piña uses four dancers to represent the different characters within herself. The dancers flail against the divisive uncertainty that looms in the presence of making decisions, yet they persistently grasp at the ephemeral to unite as one.
4. When you die, where do you go? In *Entre Sueños y Flores (Between Dreams and Flowers)*, choreographed by Víctor Manuel Ruiz to music by Meredith Monk, Thomas Tallis, John O'Connor, J. S. Bach and Sulfur, four men in limbo, not knowing they are dead, establish relationships and endure many circumstances in attempts to figure out where they are. In the end, they find their death amidst new illuminating discoveries.
5. *Bolero*, choreographed by Claudia Lavista and Víctor Manuel Ruiz, and set to Maurice Ravel's music of the same name, is a work that builds and escalates until it explodes with the complexity and crescendo of the musical score. It



Alone and My Soul, Delfos Danza Contemporánea by Lois Greenfield



## Delfos Danza Contemporánea

April 2, 3 & 4 \* 8:00 p.m.

### Other Events

**MAR 31 TUE** **COE** **DanceMasters Class**  
led by **Claudia Lavista**  
6:00 – 8:00 p.m.  
Lou Conte Dance Studio at the  
Hubbard Street Dance Center  
1147 W. Jackson

**APR 02 THU** **Post-Performance Discussion**  
*Free and open to ticket holders*

**APR 03 FRI** **Complimentary Post-Performance Reception**  
*Open to ticket holders*

**APR 04 SAT** **FamilyDance Matinee**  
3:00 p.m.  
Free Adult/Child Movement  
Workshop begins at 2:15 p.m.

**FOR TICKETS**   
**CALL 312 369 6600 OR VISIT**  
**COLUM.EDU/DANCECENTER**

### Alycia Scott

*is the community outreach and education manager at The Dance Center.*



The Dance Center's presentation of Delfos Danza Contemporánea is funded in part by the Illinois Arts Council. Special thanks to the Consulate General of Mexico, Chicago.

reflects the human struggle to throw off burdens that constrain, as well as the exhilaration within the realizations and triumphs of this endeavor.

Delfos' interest in emotions, individual obsessions and unusual encounters in day-to-day life provide fodder for the expressive and articulate body language the company is known for in the dance world. From Mexico and Europe to South America, Southeast Asia and the United States, Delfos continues to invite audiences to enter an intimate and reflective space

through their work. The company's deep-seated belief in art as an oracle propels the aesthetic, energy and prowess of their work into a realm of experience that is eloquent in its interpretations of human essence and provocative in its imaginative choreography. In hopes of provoking a new embrace of existence, Delfos magnifies the communicative power of art and the body to reveal the infinite capacity of expression and invites audiences to do the same. ■

### Tell us about your history and time with Twyla Tharp.

I was first exposed to Twyla Tharp and her company in 1972, when I was an undergrad at The Ohio State University Department of Dance. I participated in a one-day residency with the company, a marathon of a day, consisting of a lecture/demonstration, master class, open rehearsal and an informal performance. It was an amazing day! I had never seen dancers work so long and hard.

I then attended two Tharp Summer workshops at American University in Washington D.C., and finally auditioned for and joined the company in 1975. During the next 10 years, I performed in pieces for stage and film, participated in lecture/demonstrations, gave interviews, taught master classes, and assisted Twyla in projects for American Ballet Theatre, NYC Ballet, and the Broadway production of *Singin' in the Rain*.

I took some time off in 1985 to start a family with my husband Tom Rawe, who was also a member of the company. We returned to dance with the company in 1986 and toured extensively for the next two years.

After the company disbanded in 1988, I reconstructed *The Fugue* and *Sue's Leg* for Hubbard Street Dance Company with fellow dancer Rose Marie Wright.



**Jennifer Way Rawe** was a member of Twyla Tharp Dance from 1975 to 1988. During this time, Ms. Way Rawe performed throughout the United States, Europe, South America, Japan and Australia. Ms. Way Rawe has been a reconstructionist of Tharp's work for Hubbard Street Dance Company, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Dancewave's Kid's Company, Sarah Lawrence College and Marymount Manhattan College. Additionally, she taught and coordinated numerous workshops and master classes for the Tharp Company.

Ms. Way Rawe received her B.F.A. from Ohio State University and has studied with Jean Way, Duard Farquhar, Richard Thomas, Barbara Fallis, Merce Cunningham, Viola Farber, Dan Wagoner and Maggie Black.

# Teaching and Training: Spotlight on Guest Artists

The Dance Center's nationally respected academic program features a faculty comprising of working dancers, choreographers, dance educators, producers and scholars, with substantial credentials and experience locally, nationally and internationally. The regular full and part-time faculty is enhanced by nationally recognized visiting teachers and choreographers, whose participation in the program brings broader perspective and diversity of training content to the student experience. Recent guest teachers include Liz Burritt, Joe Goode, Gesel Mason, Tere O'Connor, Eiko and Koma, Kathleen Hermesdorf and Erica Wilson-Perkins.

**Jennifer Way Rawe**, who danced with Twyla Tharp Dance for more than a decade joins the list of guest choreographers for the Spring 2009 semester. Ms. Way Rawe will set a historical and signature Tharp work, *The Fugue*, on The Dance Center's Repertory Performance Workshop students. *Backstage* recently interviewed Jenny about her upcoming time at The Dance Center.

### How do you maintain Tharp's aesthetic while working with students?

The piece itself represents Twyla's aesthetic. I hope that I help to maintain that aesthetic by maintaining an honest approach to the movement and by being as thorough as possible when teaching and coaching the dance.

### What do you feel is the significance of bringing this rich and important historical work to students at The Dance Center?

*The Fugue* is a wonderful dance for students to learn because it teaches them so much about composition and their own development as dancers. Dance Center students will be able to study Twyla's early choreographic process, which was, and still is, very unique. Twyla was, in the late '60s and early '70s, beginning to develop her process for making dances. She used many choreographic devices, such as theme and variation, to develop material and construct/structure the work, and she relied on her dancers to develop and maintain that work (time to rehearse was also a very important factor in developing Twyla's material). Dance Center students will, with time and hard work, become fuller richer dancers.

Photo provided by Jenny Way Rawe

### What is your relationship with *The Fugue*? Did you perform in the original cast?

I was not an original cast member of *The Fugue*, but I was intrigued with the dance since learning a portion of it as a student at the American University Tharp workshop. I learned the piece in its entirety after joining the company and performed in the piece for nearly two years.

*The Fugue*, choreographed in 1970, is a trio and was originally created for and performed by women (Twyla Tharp, Sarah Rudner and Rose Marie Wright). A mixed cast then briefly performed it before it was finally turned over to an all-male cast in the mid-'70s. During my time with the company, I taught, rehearsed and coached *The Fugue* as part of the company's active repertory. And since leaving the company in 1988, I continue to teach and coach this dance and other Tharp repertory at various colleges, schools and private studios to this day.

### What does it mean to you to be acting in Tharp's place when restaging her work?

I don't feel that I am acting in Twyla's place, because I am not the choreographer, but I do feel that I can represent the dancer's perspective when restaging the work. I hope to give the dancers an idea of the working process that I experienced while working with the Tharp Company.