



Arch Dance & Kate Weare Put Winterfest on Cutting Edge

January 13, 2011 Since 2008, fans of the Florida Dance Association have been in for a double treat: twice the events, in the winter and in the summer, to experience today's most cutting-edge, innovative, and refreshing modern dance companies. That year, the organization's director and do-it-all guy Bill Doolin, added the WinterFest program, held in South Florida (because of logistics and resources, summer's Florida Dance Festival now takes place in Tampa, after a decade in Miami).

"I wanted WinterFest to develop its own personality. I don't want it to be thought of as a subsidiary of the Florida Dance Festival," Doolin tells Artburst Miami. "It's another component of the Florida Dance Association."

The latest edition of WinterFest began on December 27, and will run through January 29. Last weekend, the winners of the 2010 Miami-Dade County Choreography Fellowship program strutted their stuff on stage at the Byron Carlyle Theatre in North Miami Beach.

This Saturday and Sunday, the New York-based Arch Dance Company (www.jenniferarchibald.com) unleashes its *Uncomfortable Truth*, a dynamo of a piece in which seven women reclaim their personal power by confronting relationships with their mothers and coming-of-age experiences. The following weekend, on Saturday, January 22, the Kate Weare Company (www.kateweare.com), also from New York, makes its Florida debut with the presentation of two pieces, *Bridge of Sighs*, from 2008, and *Bright Land*, which had its debut at the Joyce Theater in Manhattan last fall. And on the 29th, the series wraps up for the season with *Dances for Non/Fictional Bodies*, by Jess Curtis/Gravity, a performance based project co-commissioned and co-produced with Tigertail Productions.

"My focus [with WinterFest] is still to present different parts of dance," says Doolin, who took over as interim director of Florida Dance Association in 2007, and was made director in 2009. "All the programs are very different, with different choreographers, and that's really what we want to encourage."

One need only take a look at two of the guest companies, Jennifer Archibald's Arch Dance Company and the Kate Weare Company, to see that this former dancer and still-practicing choreographer turned administrator is making all the right moves.

The Arch Dance Company, founded in 1999, has become known for its fusion of hip hop and breakdancing with classical or modern dance and jazz forms. For Doolin, Archibald "has a lot to say. She's incredibly smart, and the work says what she wants it to say."

Which is not to say that Archibald shakes her stuff MTV-style on a stage. She goes way beyond that. "She's very interested in not being just any hip hop choreographer, but of incorporating her other training into her work," adds Doolin.



The classically trained Archibald, a Toronto native who moved to New York City to study with whom she calls “the masters”, the Alvin Ailey School of Dance, experienced firsthand the city’s street culture, and saw that there was a depth in it seldom explored.

“It’s not just a matter of you swinging your hair and popping your butt,” says the 32-year-old choreographer and Alvin Ailey School graduate, who has taught workshops at the Florida Dance Association since the mid-2000s and will do so again during this visit. “There’s something else, something very deep about the [hip hop] movement. Where did it originate? Why were these kids on the street fighting each other? The guns were taken away, so they went to these clubs and they battled with their bodies. That’s why there’s so much power behind the movement.”

And anything that highlights the power of the human spirit speaks to Archibald and serves as inspiration. For *The Uncomfortable Truth*, for example, she interviewed her dancers on what their relationships with their mothers had been like; what was it like coming of age; and what traits of their mothers they saw in themselves.

“The concept of any of my works has to be close to my heart before I go into the studio,” explains Archibald. “And once I can develop a strong storyline, then I choose the dancers, and figure out which dancers can bring the story alive. It’s always concept first, unless I come across music that is extremely empowering.”

Music and sound are also empowering for Kate Weare. In the two pieces that her company of four dancers, including Florida-raised Douglas Gillespie, who got his BFA from Florida State University, will showcase as part of WinterFest, her newest work, *Bright Land*, is set to the soundtrack of an old time, soulful band called The Crooked Jades. Her *Bridge of Sighs*, meanwhile, explores the sounds human bodies can make.

“I always have a strong feeling that dance contains its own musicality,” says Weare by phone from New York City. “In *Bridge*, there is an entire duet of the dancers essentially slapping each other, so we were really playing with what kinds of sounds we could make with the body and what metaphorically we were speaking about. In general, I really love hearing the body make noise and be earthy and show the struggle that is happening, the strain.”

A strain of a different kind, more like a groan, is commonly made by people who go see modern dance and complain that they “don’t get it.” Archibald and Weare have some wise advice for everyone who’s felt that way at one time or another.

“There’s good reason to be intimidated by modern dance, because the roots of it are very counter-culture. So there’s a reason that it feels challenging for many audiences,” acknowledges Weare, a thirtysomething California-native who’s been dancing since she was two. “But here’s what I would say concretely: you don’t need to go into a dance performance and think that you have to figure it out, pin down the meaning and language, be able to articulate what you saw, and have an intellectual experience because



that's really not where dance operates the best. The strength and the value of dance are underneath your conscious awareness. It's about sensation, it's about emotional experience, and it's about visceral experience channeled through the body."

Archibald too knows what needs to be channeled: "My main focus is coming up with a concept that the audience can relate to. I don't want to do a work that's so abstract that someone who's never watched dance says 'that's exactly why I don't watch dance.' I want it to be something that people can get."