

Modern, Creative & Fierce

By Jen Poiry-Prough

Larry Keigwin aims to change your mind about modern dance.

The style has a reputation for being high-handed and inaccessible. But when Keigwin + Company, the 10-year-old Manhattan-based dance troupe, comes to Fort Wayne on April 13 as guests of the Fort Wayne Dance Collective, they will have you looking at modern dance in a whole new light.

Don't believe me? Dance Spirit magazine calls them "the coolest kids in modern dance." Founder Larry Keigwin himself is young, vibrant and funny, and his personality is reflected in his choreography.

The April 13 program consists of five distinct dances, some narrative, others more abstract." The only common thread," says Keigwin, "is that the dancing is fierce."

Not just fierce, but personal and exploding with creativity. Fort Wayne Dance Collective founder Liz Monnier explains the difference between modern and classical styles. "Modern dancers are not bound to positions or steps," she says, "so the sky is the limit in what is created. This is why modern dance has such a huge range and is so very creative in nature."

Monnier admits that like any genre of performing arts, some may feel that modern dance is outside their comfort zone – Dancing with the Stars this is not.

But, she says, "The energy is exhilarating. Modern dance has changed and morphed a lot just within the last five to 10 years to include a wide genre of dance forms."

"The work is very entertaining and theatrically driven," says Keigwin. "The pieces are very relatable, and they all have universal themes of the human condition."

Keigwin also uses popular music in many of his works to appeal to a universal audience.

The dance piece "Love Song," is set to pop music by Aretha Franklin, Roy Orbison, and Nina Simone. "Boys" is set to a suite of jazz tunes sung by Eartha Kitt, and "Girls" is set to Frank Sinatra songs.

Rounding out the performance are two slightly more abstract pieces, "Seven" and "Triptych."

Monnier says her favorite piece is "Seven," which she says "plays off the idea of how many ways and combina-

tion of numbers you can play with seven dancers on stage."

She also loves "Triptych" because "you can just relax and be awed by the ingenuity of the movement phrases."

Keigwin says the shows are family-safe and have a sense of humor. "Kids are the first to respond to the humor [in the dances]," he says. "They're the least judgmental and the most open-minded."

Monnier agrees. "I think this would be a great show to expose kids to another type of dance form that is not competitive in any way," she says. "No judges, just the pure enjoyment of movement."

She also appreciates the impact this residency will have on the community, "especially the young and impressionable dance community."

She says that the last year's residency of Rubberbandance Group from Montreal "made a huge impression on the dance students of South Side High School and deepened their commitment to the art form. It opened up their eyes to a larger perspective of dance as a performance art and possibly as a career."

The dancers Keigwin hires bring their own unique personalities to their performances. Keigwin + Company was

founded 10 years ago, and this is the company's second generation of dancers. The young company is dancing some parts that were created by founding members but are also creating new ones themselves.

Keigwin says his process is very collaborative. "My specialty is excavating personality and bringing it to the stage," he says. "I give a lot of allowance in creating the dances."

"They are unique in their process of creation," says Monnier. "Keigwin relies on his dancers as co-creators, using improvisation as a tool in designing the final product."

"Girls," one of the company's newest pieces, features a trio of female dancers. To create the piece, Keigwin video recorded the women improvising dances to Frank Sinatra tunes and then set the improvisations as choreography. "It was like they were riffing in a club but with technical prowess," he explains.

Some of the pieces are very personal to

KEIGWIN + COMPANY
FORT WAYNE DANCE COLLECTIVE
 Saturday, April 13 • 8-9:15 p.m.
 Arts United Center
 303 E. Main St., Fort Wayne
 Tix: \$21-\$25 thru box office,
 260-422-4226 or fwdc.org

Keigwin himself. "[The piece titled] 'Boys' draws on his

history of growing up with several brothers," says Monnier. "Boys" contains many elements of humor, including hints of The Three Stooges, as well as tender moments depicting Keigwin's feeling of being the "odd man out" among his brothers.

Keigwin + Company is not just dedicated to entertaining but to teaching as well. Company member Matthew Baker will be conducting a master class at the FWDC on Friday, April 12 (call 260-424-6574 to register).

"Dancers from all over Fort Wayne and throughout Indiana attend master classes at the Fort Wayne Dance Collective," says Monnier. "The energy generated in these workshops is amazing."

The public performance will be the following day, Saturday, April 13, at 8 p.m. at the Arts United Center.

"Everyone should get the family out to see this show," Keigwin says. "It will leave them smiling ear to ear."

Monnier says audiences "will be amazed at the physical abilities of these dancers. They are all stallions."



Thursday, April 11 • 8:00pm

TOMMY CASTRO & THE PAINKILLERS

\$20 Adv., \$25 D.O.S.



Thursday, April 18 • 8:00pm

VICTOR WOOTEN

\$30 Adv., \$35 D.O.S.



Wednesday, April 24 • 8:00pm

JANIVA MAGNESS

\$20 Adv., \$25 D.O.S.

Thursday, May 2 • 7:00pm

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