PILLOWNOTES

In Praise of Athletic Beauty

In Praise of Athletic Beauty

For spectators at this event, being in a place where divine and heroic presence converged through athletes’ performance, in an uncannily unexpected appearance of a body in space, suddenly taking on a beautiful form that just as quickly and irreversibly dissolves, can be thought of as a kind of epiphany. Such epiphanies are, I believe, the source of the joy we feel when we watch this une xpected appearance of a body in space, suddenly taking on a beautiful form that just as quickly and irreversibly dissolve, can be thought of as a kind of epiphany. Such epiphanies are, I believe, the source of the joy we feel when we watch

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- Abby Zbikowski

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**ABBY ZBIKOWSKI** (Choreographer) is a Bessie Award-winning choreographer. Zbikowski created her company Abby Z and the New Utility in 2012 with core company members Fiona Lundie and Jennifer Meckley to experiment with the potential and choreographic possibility of the body being pushed beyond its perceived limits, as well as to create a new movement lexicon that works towards triangulating dancing/moving bodies across multiple cultural value systems simultaneously. Her work has focused on reclaiming the brutal rigor that goes into the practice and performance of hyper-physical dance forms by shifting the mindset of the labor away from product and repositioning the choreographic work as a vehicle for transformation that welcomes failure as an inevitability on the path to growth. The company has been presented by Gibney Dance Center, Movement Research at Danspace Project, Abrons Arts Center, the 92nd Street Y, and more. Zbikowski is a current 2017 Choreographer-in-Residence at the Lewis Center of the Arts at Princeton University, an Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of Illinois, and on faculty at the American Dance Festival. She has studied intensively at Germaine Acogne’s L’École de Sables in Senegal and holds a B.F.A. in Dance from Temple University and an M.F.A. in Dance from The Ohio State University. Meckley has previously taught at West Chester University, Cuyahoga Community College, and Northampton Community College. She currently teaches at Ball State University, The University of Dayton, and actively pushes the boundaries of physicality through performance as a member of Abby Z and the New Utility since its founding in 2012 and as Rehearsal Director since 2016. She has performed at well-known venues and dance festivals including The American Dance Festival in Durham, NC, Bates Dance Festival in Lewiston, ME, Judson Church Movement Research in NYC, DoublePlus in NYC, newMoves Contemporary Dance Festival in Pittsburgh, the Fusebox Festival in Austin, TX, and the ICA Boston.

**FIONA LUNDIE** (Rehearsal Director & Performer) is a movement artist and cognitive scientist interested in what is vital about how and why we move, what form that movement takes, and how it shapes our perspective. She holds a B.A. in Cognitive Science from Dartmouth College and an M.F.A. in Dance from The Ohio State University. She has performed with Abby Z and the New Utility since its inception in 2012, became Rehearsal Director in 2016, and Business Manager in 2017 as the company has grown. Lundie also teaches PopAction and Flying Trapeze at STREB in Brooklyn and has performed with the STREB Extreme Action Company. She has had the pleasure of performing with Abby Z and the New Utility at Abrons Arts Center, the 92nd Street Y, Movement Research Festival at Danspace, and DoublePlus Series at Gibney Dance Center in NYC, as well as The American Dance Festival in NC, the newMoves Contemporary Dance Festival in Pittsburgh, the Fusebox Festival in Austin, TX, and the ICA Boston.

**JENNIFER MECKLEY** (Rehearsal Director & Performer) is a modern dance artist greatly inspired by the hip-hop culture and aims to spread knowledge of street dance in academia. She obtained a B.A. in Dance from Slippery Rock University and an M.F.A. in Dance from The Ohio State University. Meckley has performed with the Towson University Dance Company as well as choreographed/performed for Third Rail Projects: Then She Fell, as well as The American Dance Festival in NC, the newMoves Contemporary Dance Festival in Pittsburgh, PA, Inhale Performance Arts Series in Philadelphia, PA, Abrons Arts Center in NYC, and the ICA Boston.

**ALEXA BENDER** (Performer) was born and raised in a small town in Ontario, Canada, where she began her early dance practice. She moved to New York in 2012, where she received her B.F.A. in Dance Performance from Marymount Manhattan College. Additionally, she has trained privately with California-based Master Teacher Paula Morgan, and is also a certified teacher in the Paula Morgan Technique. Bender met Abby Z in 2016 where she began training in her distinct movement vocabulary. She continues to expand her movement language and understanding through teaching and choreography, as well as a variety of other cross-training practices to keep life interesting and confront new physical challenges, in the pursuit of never settling for what is comfortable or familiar.

**SERENA CHANG** (Performer) was born and raised in Ohio, earned her B.F.A. in Dance, B.S. in Molecular Genetics, and minor in Chinese from The Ohio State University. During her time at OSU, she was able to study under Susan Hadley, Bebe Miller, Abby Zbikowski, and Jimmy Ortiz. Chang is currently dancing with Abby Z and the New Utility, Third Rail Projects: Then She Fell, and BodyStories: Teresa Fellion Dance, and has worked with freelance artists such as Michelle Thompson Ulerich and Second Best Dance in New York. She is a recipient of the Pelotonia Cancer Research Fellowship and Columbus Dance Theater Fellowship for her choreography. Chang continues to create work in New York with a focus on multidisciplinary collaborations, accessibility, and research. She is eager to spread opportunities for choreographers and serves on the artist committee for National Choreography Month (NACHMO).

**SHAELA DAVIS** (Performer) is a dance artist/teacher/choreographer in the Greater Baltimore area. She received her B.F.A. in Dance Performance with a K-12 Teaching Certification from Towson University. She performed with the Towson University Dance Company as well as choreographed/performed for the 2013 American College Dance Festival in VA. She also trained on scholarship at the American Dance Festival where she performed in repertory by Vanessa Voskul and Abby Zbikowski. Davis has taught for Towson University Community Dance and the Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore, and currently teaches at Morton Street Dance Center. As well as being a dancer with Abby Z and the New
Utility, Davis is a dancer with Full Circle Dance Company. Davis is excited to be “doing the thing” with Abby Z and the New Utility.

**BENJAMIN ROACH (Performer)** is a movement research artist and educator based in Queens, NY. He has danced with Dance the Yard, eSkay Arts Collective, Rosie Hererra Dance Theatre, and is a current company member of Josh Pacheco Dance Theatre. In 2019, alongside Caitlin Morgan, Roach co-founded Piug Dance Theatre. The dynamic interdisciplinary duo has presented work at various venues including LATEA Theater, The Craft, The Actors Fund Art Center, and Mark Morris Dance Group. In 2018, Roach received his B.F.A. in Dance Performance and Choreography from Ohio University. While attending OU, he had the opportunity to dance for David Dorfman, Jasmine Hearn, Kendra Portier, Meredith Lyons, Gladys Bailin-Stern, Ani Javian, and Travis Gatling. His own choreographic work has been presented at the Patricia N. Nanon Theatre, Big River Dance Festival, E. Turner Stump Theater, and the 2018 American College Dance Association East Central Gala Concert.

**JON HARPER (Lighting Designer)** is a NYC-based lighting designer and also the Director of Production at Abrons Arts Center. He has worked in the past as the lighting supervisor for Pilobolus, Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, and Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. Other recent designs have been with Target Margin Theater, Dylan Crossman, Brian Rogers, Lisa McKee, and Julie Atlas Muz & Mat Fraser/ONEOFUS. He is married to Madeline Best of the Chocolate Factory Theater, with whom he shares the distinct joy of parenting two amazing toddlers.

**MOMAR NDIAYE (Dramaturg)** is an internationally recognized dance artist from Senegal who has taught and toured his work both in the States and abroad. He received his M.F.A. in Dance from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where he taught contemporary and traditional African dance forms. Since 2010, Ndiaye has danced for internationally acclaimed choreographer Andrey Ouamba in the Dakar-based company Premier Temps and was selected as a Dance Web participant at Impuls Tanz Festival in Vienna, Austria, in 2012. He has been developing work with his own company, Cadanses, since 2004 and in 2015, his evening length piece Toxu was a finalist laureate in the Danse L'Afrique Danse (Africa and Caribbean in Creation) Festival in St. Louis and Senegal and toured to Europe as part of the Belluard Festival in Switzerland. In 2016, Ndiaye was selected to participate in two intercultural projects, Shifting Realities, supported by Tanz Haus and Hellerau in Germany, and 1space, a collaboration between KVS Brussel, Exodus in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and Alkantara Lisbon, Portugal. More info at lacadanses.com

**RAPHAEL XAVIER (Composer)** is a musician, choreographer, dancer, painter, photographer, and polyvalent artist who created the soundscape for this work. Awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for choreography in 2016, Xavier has been a breakin’ practitioner since 1983. An active alumnus of the world renowned hip-hop dance company, Rennie Harris Puremovement, Xavier has gone on to forge an exceptional approach to improvisation, creating new ways to expand the vocabulary of the dance form.
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PILLOWNOTES

**by Maura Keefe**

The PillowNotes series comprises essays commissioned from our Scholars-in-Residence to provide audiences with a broader context for viewing dance.

**In Praise of Athletic Beauty**

Maura Keefe


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**NEW UTILITY**

June 26-30, 2019

Doris Duke Theatre

Abby Zbikowski

Fiona Lundie

Jennifer Meckley

Jon Harper

Alex Bender

Serena Chang

Shelae Davis

Roobi Gaskins

Alex Gossen

Gabrielle Loren

Fiona Lundie

Jennifer Meckley

Benjamin Roach

**CHOREOGRAPHER**

Abby Zbikowski

**REHEARSAL DIRECTORS**

Fiona Lundie

**DRAMATURG**

Jennifer Meckley

**COMPOSER**

Raphael Xavier

**LIGHTING DESIGN**

Jon Harper

**STYLE DESIGN**

Abby Zbikowski

Karen Zbikowski

Alex Bender

Serena Chang

Shelae Davis

Roobi Gaskins

Alex Gossen

Gabrielle Loren

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