

THE FOG OF MEMORY Jessie Gutierrez reaches out.



Stepping around

From sculpture to set to video to score—and back again.

By Zachary Whittenburg

One hundred six pairs of cast-iron legs mingle at the south end of Grant Park. Although Magdalena Abakanowicz's installation, *Agora*, is still fairly new, the concrete on which its sculptures stand is well-stained with plumes that shoot off each figure's foot; these comet tails of rust fading from east to west are the permanent record of four years on the shore of Lake Michigan. *Agora*'s figures account for less than a tenth of the giant, headless bodies the Polish artist has placed in parks and museums around the world, but to her they're part of a universal community. "I'm immersed in the crowd," she's said of her work, "like a grain of sand."

A book of Abakanowicz's art was brought by choreographer Jan Bartoszek to an initial design meeting with sculptor Barbara Cooper for Hedwig Dances' *Dance of Forgotten Steps*, premiering Thursday 1 at the Dance Center. Like Abakanowicz, Cooper is best known for her public art and site-specific projects (that's her stainless-steel-and-brass bouquet *Transitions* hanging from the ceiling of the Paulina Brown Line station). She's

forayed into set design just once before, in 2005 for a production of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*. Still, making the jump to dance wasn't a stretch. "All of my work focuses on ideas of flow, of fluidity, the implication of movement," she says. For *Steps*, she's created five tall screens, wax-coated steel frames holding translucent black fabric. The panels are longitudinally and asymmetrically curved, leaving comma-shaped footprints that allow them to be left standing when they're rearranged by the dancers. Cooper, having just finished their construction, is excited to see how her set pieces frame the action. During a studio run-through with the rest of the creative team, she leans over to say, "They're like parentheses." They are, and turned concave, they're also a clean précis of the halved shells of *Agora*, each loosely fitting a single body. Her choice of material is functional, allowing middle-ground



stopping points for the piece's video projections, which appear distinctly on the sheer fabric and again, larger and dimmer, on the upstage backdrop.

The projections, white-on-black "negative shadows" of the dancers, are still being tweaked by media artist/videographer Petra Poul Bachmaier. Like *Agora*'s rusty comet tails, the silhouettes' opacity diffuses away from their hands; it's like seeing focused

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palms on the frosted glass of a shower door, the body behind faded into fog. Bachmaier pulled the shadows' motion from footage of the dancers and plans to toy with congruence peeling off its connection to the onstage action. "I'm not going to be working with live feeds," she says, "but I do want it to appear that I am." She uses video-editing software called Isadora, a program created by Mark Coniglio of Troika Ranch. "It's the best software for live performance," Bachmaier says, although her ears perk up when Victoria "Toy" Delorio mentions she's been able to use QLab for video as well as audio design.

Delorio, a former dancer who never thought she would be creating music for choreography, is recording interviews with each dancer about a past event at their identity's core. These stories have already been turned into movement, becoming slippery solos, a tangled duet and ensemble scenes. Jessie Gutierrez repeats a gesture we interpret as contact lenses being taken out; afterward, Gutierrez explains they're tears for friends and family in her native Cuba she had to leave without knowing when she would return. Delorio plans to weave audio from her interviews into a collage of music Bartoszek chose; her eyes are bright as she explains how shared experience is the center of *Steps*' gravity. "Turning these specific histories into gestures and movement expands them to get at the universal community all human beings share, and I think that's what keeps [*Steps*] from becoming sad. That's just how life is."

Hedwig Dances celebrates its 25th anniversary at the Dance Center Thursday 1 through Saturday 3. See Listings.

Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (dance@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Zachary Whittenburg**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue, nearest El station or bus routes, contact information and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 10am on Monday, ten days before publication date.**

* Recommended or notable
† Cheap

Thursday 1

* **Billy Elliot the Musical** *Oriental Theater, 24 W Randolph St (312-902-1400). El: Red to Lake; Blue to Washington; Orange, Green, Brown, Pink, Purple (rush hrs) to Randolph. 7:30pm, \$30-\$100. Our joy at seeing Lee Hall and Stephen Daldry's simple, touching film in 2000 was long overdue: Who knows what we did to deserve it, or who dropped a house on whose sister, but dance has been cursed with horrible movies about it for decades. *Billy Elliot*'s stage musical adaptation, by Hall and Sir Elton John, has matched if not exceeded the film's appeal, scooping up ten Tonys in the process; after Australia and Broadway, it's here for an open run.*

* **Hedwig Dances 25th Anniversary Concert** *Dance Center of Columbia College, 1306 S Michigan Ave (312-369-8330, colum.edu/dancecenter). El: Red, Orange, Green to Roosevelt. Bus: 1, 3, 4, 129. Metro: Elec Main to Roosevelt Road. 8pm, \$24-\$28. In addition to artistic director Jan Bartoszek's newest, *Dance of Forgotten Steps*, Hedwig's blowing out the candles with two acquisitions. Susan Marshall's *Sawdust Palace Suite* was made for a venue the size of a postage stamp, fitting (and possibly inspiring) its references to cabaret and vaudeville. The Dance Center stage will give it breathing room and a more expansive feel. *Dust*, a male duet Bartoszek commissioned from Andrea Miller, is a compelling and raw showcase for Justin Deschamps and Michel Rodriguez, who negotiate its volleys between pedestrian and explosive movement without affectation. See "Stepping around," this page.*

* **Kathak with Archana Kumar** *Perceptual Motion Dance Studio, 4057 N Damen Ave (773-549-3958, perceptualmotiondance.com). El: Brown to Irving Park. Bus: 11, 50, 80. 7:30pm; single session \$30, \$100 for four, \$240 for all 12. Accomplished teacher/performer Kumar wants to school you in the art of *kathak*, a North Indian classical-dance form. Her Thursday night class runs for the next 12 weeks; interested parties must provide their own *dupatta* (a long scarf) and may purchase *ghungroos* (wide anklets covered with small bells) on-site if needed. Learn more and register by phone at 773-600-2282 or via e-mail at kathakdance@hotmail.com.*

Friday 2

* **Billy Elliot the Musical** 8pm. See Thu 1.
† **El Circo Cheapo** *The Aft Loft, 2041 W Carroll Ave, #306 (773-507-2604). El: Green, Pink to Ashland. Bus: 9, 50, 65, 10pm, \$10. Shayna Swanson's monthly variety-show grab bag has become a hot ticket. She strongly suggests—and we second—reserving a spot in advance. She also swears she'll return your ten dollars if you piss and moan about how you had a*