

Jennifer Owen
Brad Cox
Founders

Jennifer Owen
Artistic Director

Rebka Sakati
**Artistic Director,
Take the Stage**

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Performance Information & Opportunities

2016-2017 Season



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Mission

Owen/Cox Dance Group is an ensemble committed to creating and performing new and innovative dance works in collaboration with nationally recognized dancers, musicians, and visual artists.

The group's mission is to create new music and dance collaborations, to present high-quality contemporary dance performances with live music, and to engage as wide an audience as possible through affordable live performances and education and outreach programs.

With this mission in mind, founders Jennifer Owen and Brad Cox bring together some of Kansas City's most talented artists, representing a variety of genres, to perform contemporary dance with live music. With diverse backgrounds ranging from the Bolshoi Ballet and the Leningrad Chamber Orchestra, to Alvin Ailey and Dave Brubeck, these dancers and musicians form a highly skilled and multi-faceted corps. The collaborative results speak for themselves: fresh and vibrant new works that are classical in form, but contemporary in expression.

Since its debut performance the company's accomplishments include:

- Two world premieres commissioned by the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
- Collaborations with artists Peregrine Honig, Peggy Noland, Mark Southerland, and NEA Fellow Nate Fors
- Participation in annual events *Spring to Dance Festival*, *Modern Night at the Folly*, *Dance in the Park*, and *New Dance Partners*
- *Take the Stage*, an educational initiative bringing music and dance to students in the Kansas City area
- Creative partnerships with newEar Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, Urban Culture Project, The People's Liberation Big Band, YWCA of Greater Kansas City, Bach Aria Soloists, and Paseo Academy
- Inclusion in KCYA's Arts Partners Roster and Missouri Touring Performers Directory
- Serving as fiscal sponsor for *Kansas City Dance Festival*
- Receiving the Pitch Weekly 2012 Artopia Award



History Highlights

- 2007 – Owen/Cox Dance debut performance.
- 2008 – Premiere of *Bottom of the Big Top* in collaboration with NEA Fellow Nate Fors.
- 2009 – First performance of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* with students from Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing Arts.
- 2010 – Premiere of *The Golem* in collaboration with the Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy and Paul Mesner Puppets.
- 2011 – Performed at *Spring to Dance* in St. Louis.
- 2012 – First tour of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* to Graceland University, IA.
- 2013 – Launched our educational outreach program, *Take the Stage*.
- 2014 – Premiere of *Memory Palace* in collaboration with New Orleans cellist Helen Gillet, Mark Southerland, and Peregrine Honig.
- 2015 - World premiere of *Ludus Tonalis* in collaboration with pianist Kairy Koshoeva.
- 2016 – Selected as the Resident Company for the Great Friends Dance Festival, 2016, held in New Port, Rhode Island.

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Jennifer Owen – Artistic Director, Co-Founder

Jennifer Owen's ballet career has taken her around the globe. After training with Pacific Northwest Ballet School, San Francisco Ballet School, School of American Ballet, and the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, she went on to dance with the Russian State Ballet, Moscow

Renaissance Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Hong Kong Ballet, BalletMet, and had the unique experience of appearing as a guest artist with the National Ballet of Turkmenistan. Notable roles danced include the title role in *Giselle*, Kitri in *Don Quixote*, principal roles in George Balanchine's *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* and *Donizetti Variations*, and the central pas de deux in Todd Bolender's *Arena*. She has choreographed over forty new works for Owen/Cox Dance, as well as nine works for Kansas City Ballet's "In the Wings" choreographic workshop, and a winning entry for the 2006 Columbus Choreography Project. Owen is the recipient of a 2000 Princess Grace Honorarium.

Brad Cox – Co-Founder

A composer in the uniquely American Ellington model, Brad is dedicated to forming long lasting relationships with musicians and writing music for those musicians. Brad is a founder and contributing composer to The People's Liberation Big Band of Greater Kansas City, and conceived and organized the ensemble's versions of *The Nutcracker* and *the Mouse King* and *The Battleship Potemkin*. In addition to his work with Owen/Cox Dance, he has created compositions and arrangements for Sony Classical recording artist Nathan Granner, Grammy award-winning producer and engineer Russ Elevado, Paris-based songwriter Krystle Warren and nationally-recognized puppeteer Paul Mesner. Brad is a 2009 recipient of the Tanne Foundation Award, and 2010 recipient of the Charlotte Street Foundation Generative Performing Artist Award.

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Memory Palace

A full-length work created with the dynamic force that is New Orleans cellist Helen Gillet. *Memory Palace*

delves into the complex process of how memories are constructed, and what happens to people when memories begin to deteriorate. This program tours with seven dancers and three musicians.

The Nutcracker and the Mouse King

Almost everyone is familiar with the traditional version of the holiday story *The Nutcracker*. Far fewer are aware of the original and notably darker inspiration for this beloved ballet--E.T.A Hoffman's 1816 story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. This modern jazz adaptation of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* features both original music and radical rearrangements of Tchaikovsky melodies created by a host of innovative Kansas City jazz musicians. This program tours with nine dancers and sixteen musicians of The People's Liberation Big Band of Greater Kansas City. This production also involves auditioning local dance students for the tour.



The Goldberg Variations

The Goldberg Variations is rarely performed in its entirety, even more unusual to be used for dance, and rarer still for the dance to be performed with live music. By presenting this Bach masterpiece with contemporary dance, this production allows audience members to experience the work through new ears and eyes. This program tours with twelve dancers and award-winning pianist Kairy Koshoeva.

Repertoire shows are available upon request. Performance fees range from \$7,500-\$20,000, contact us for further information.

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Take the Stage

Take the Stage is a high-energy, in-school dance residency program designed to uplift and inspire youth to excellence. Through a positive and dynamic experience in the arts we provide children the opportunity to discover the tools necessary to become successful in academics and in life. Take the Stage can be brought as a 1-hour workshop to schools serving 2nd through 5th grade.



Master Classes & Workshops

Master Classes and Workshops are offered in schools, colleges, dance studios, and other facilities. These present a unique opportunity to experience an Owen/Cox Dance ballet technique class and learn repertoire from current company members and directors.



Paseo Academy

Each year several advanced dance students from Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing Arts are selected to rehearse and perform alongside Owen/Cox Dance's professional dancers in the ensemble's annual

production of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. This program provides a rare and valuable opportunity for the student dancers, and is often sited as the highlight of their dance experience. For a touring version of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, local dance students are auditioned for the production.



Endorsements

"The Owen/Cox experience is one not to be missed, and one of the great examples of creative collaboration that Kansas City has to offer."

-Karen Hauge, *KCMetropolis*

"I want to thank you, again, for 'Memory Palace.' I believe it may be the most poetic and emotional work you have done. It arose from your memories (body and mind) and touched ours. And where but in memory live the dreamy, almost-present experiences of the past? So beautiful. So evocative. So understated yet expressive of the deepest realm of human experience. It continues to play in my ears and eyes, and, I suspect will live on in my own memory palace."

-Jan Schall, *The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*

"The Owen/Cox Dance Group's interpretation of ancient Jewish folklore is a thoroughly charming mix of elegant dancing, an exciting original score and a dash of bold theatricality... The rabbi is danced by the charismatic Christopher Barksdale, who probably moves with stunning grace even as he stumbles to the coffeemaker in the morning."

-Robert Trussell, *The Kansas City Star*

"...they made a Bach sonata come to life in a way that we instrumentalists can only dream of, and they should be commended for their energetic and diverse treatment of this music that often gets pigeon-holed as square and predictable when really it is magnificent and exciting."

-Karen Hauge, *KCMetropolis*

The pairing of the longtime purveyors of forward-looking classical music [NewEar Contemporary Chamber Ensemble] and the acclaimed dance company accentuated the strengths of both Kansas City-based ensembles...The daring combination contained a stimulating level of suspense."

-Bill Brownlee, *The Kansas City Star*

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Booking Information

If you are interested in booking or learning more about Owen/Cox Dance, please call or send us an email!

Jennifer Owen, Artistic Director
mail@owencoxdance.org
816.931.1277

Joanne Sandorfi, Operations Manager
Joanne.owencoxdance@gmail.com
816.533.5904

Please visit our website for more information, photos, and videos!

www.owencoxdance.org



O p ening windows to the self

By James Henry, KCMetropolis

July 2, 2014

The Owen/Cox Dance Group in collaboration with Helen Gillet, Mark Southerland, and Peregrine Honig, took a nearly-full Spencer Theater on an imaginative, introspective journey in building "Memory Palace."



The Helen F. Spencer Theatre filled steadily Saturday night to hold a near-capacity audience for the world premiere of *Memory Palace*, an enigmatic production constructed by some of Kansas City's most imaginative creators: Owen/Cox Dance Group, Mark Southerland, and Peregrine Honig, with guest cellist, Helen Gillet. With so many creative forces working in tandem, it might have been easy for such a work to become a disjointed experience, forcing focus on one or another compartmentalized aspect of the performance. Instead, *Memory Palace* was wave after wave of sensory stimulation, each aspect intertwined

intimate, subtle, subjective experience for viewers.

The combination of ballet and modern dance sensibilities matched the music, which alternated between original folk songs and improvisational interludes edging closer to acid jazz. The overall effect was perhaps that of lounging in a smoky nightclub, seeing memories long forgotten, entranced by nursery rhymes you forgot you knew. The stark set, with only a table and seven chairs as set pieces, complemented by appropriate lighting and costume choices, provided just enough structure for the audience's imaginations to take flight.

The one-hour production opened with all seven of Owen/Cox's dancers seated around the table in pensive postures—some in calm contemplation, others in more anxious realization or tribulation. The music and choreography built steadily into the first of seven songs that explored the peaks and valleys of the human pathos.

Ranging from Alyssa Gold's delicate "Veil" to Demetrius McClendon's athletic, angst-filled "Cake," the dancers were each featured solo (save Michael Davis and Holly DeWitt who shared a dynamic duet) between ensemble numbers. Sara Chun's "Burn" was an audience favorite, and her movement was agile and fluid. The sense of rhythm was generally solid across the ensemble, and the choreography was very much in touch with the music, even when the latter gave little on which to grasp. The dancers' breaking into simultaneous

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and trios lent the scene a little chaos and kept things visually interesting. It also made moments of cohesion among the seven dancers all-the-more impressive. For me, the most artistically interesting ensemble moment of Jennifer Owen's choreography involved the group standing close together and moving nearly in-sync, always with one dancer leading the motion and one dancer trying desperately to escape the group.

Sung and (mostly) composed by New Orleans-based cellist Helen Gillet, the songs were whimsical and memorable and easy to lose oneself in. Her use of a loop pedal was deft, particularly in fast-paced "Run;" with sung lines and arpeggiated motifs building with meticulous accuracy atop driving percussive effects on the body of the instrument. Mark Southerland's easy tenor saxophone contributed to the aforementioned lounge atmosphere during some of the songs, and he was featured prominently during more improvisational interludes. If the interludes were actually improvised, the connection between music and choreography is made more impressive—particularly in McClendon's solo, the dancer's motions matched the nervous pointillist effects of Southerland's and pianist Brad Cox's playing.

Any sense of traditional plot was pushed aside in favor of a format that appealed to each audience member individually. There remained an emotional arc to the performance, with themes sometimes cutting to the core of life in a way that is

coming from the show's creative director Peregrine Honig. From the nearly-symmetrical program art to the curation of wispy yet tactile garments by Yuli Urano and Maegan Stracey, Honig's sensibilities and style were present throughout the experience. *Memory Palace*, it seems, was constructed with distinct intention and, through the creative collaboration and commitment of all those involved, stood atop a thematic foundation that made the Spencer Theatre's stage more of a window into one's own self than into some external story.

The execution was nearly pristine; there were a few moments when a leap that wanted to be simultaneous was not, or when a fluid movement was interrupted with slight jerkiness. The piano was out of tune—a choice I hope was deliberate—which ultimately made sense but took a moment of acclimation. In completely eschewing tradition, I felt like the experience climaxed early and would have benefited from a little more variety in musical structure, particularly in transitional moments.

These skilled artists working together gave the audience keys to their own *Memory Palace*. It was an exploratory, sensory delight that is exemplary of the cutting edge of art: poignant, well-wrought, relatable, and mind-expanding. While it might be difficult to recreate, it was a meaningful examination of subjectivity and commonality in experience, and was a fine display by a team of very talented individuals.

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O W en/Cox Dance offers humorous view through the looking glass at ‘The Nutcracker’

By Ann Spivak, The Kansas City Star

December 15, 2010



If the “Nutcracker and the Mouse King” by the Owen/Cox Dance Group and the People’s Liberation Big Band were simply a twisted take on the classic ballet, I doubt there’d be much to savor.

But this production has it all — great jazz reworkings of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky melodies (a delight to listen to), top-notch dancers (Christopher Barksdale makes a splendid and scary Drosselmeier), a suspenseful story and fanciful costumes and designs by Peregrine Honig, Peggy Noland and Mark Southerland, which make the stage at Union Station pop with color and life.

There isn’t a down moment in this whimsical, humorous tale, which is loosely based on the original E.T.A.

Hoffman story.
The

performance opens with an outburst by the big band, 18 musicians who blare their horns and beat on drums from their place behind the stage. Band leader Brad Cox also provides bits of witty narration along the way with comments such as “Truth be told, he was a very strange man,” speaking of Drosselmeier, and later, after the Nutcracker is broken: “With another Christmas Eve ruined entirely,” it is time for bed.

In this version, dancer Betty Kondo plays Marie, a young girl who is given a Nutcracker by her godfather Drosselmeier. Jennifer Owen plays the naughty brother, Fritz, who breaks the Nutcracker. He’s not a bad kid, the narrator says, just a boy who’s had too much sugar.

Soon Marie is asleep and the battle begins. The mice dancers follow the trumpet-blowing Mouse King (Southerland) onto the stage. Their silver, metal-like costumes jingle as they dance, and Marie eventually provides her Nutcracker with a sword to slay the Mouse King. After the victory, there’s some great solo dancing by Barksdale.

The second act, similar to the classic ballet version, shows off the dancers — thanks to Owen’s wonderful choreography. Once again, Cox gets the crowd laughing as he introduces Act II as a time for dances that are “culturally insensitive” and based on old stereotypes. The Chinese dance is an inspired display of leaps and turns, and the music, arranged by globe-trotting

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Patrick Alonzo Conway, was powerful and mysterious.

The Arabian dance is especially tantalizing with the male and female dancers playing a seductive pair. He wears purple silk pants, and she's in a naughty nightie. Owen wears a pink wig in the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, where she's anything but sweet in her raunchy rendition. Like the other performers, she's not just dancing, she's acting for the audience and loving it. And Latra Wilson wows the crowd with her Spanish Doll dance.

By far my favorite segment is the pas de deux. Here we see what we've been waiting for — Marie dancing with her Nutcracker. There's a beautiful mix here of traditional ballet and contemporary dance, and by this time you're completely sucked into the story. The music is at its best here, too, as the classic piece is turns into a sort of doo-wop slow dance that builds to a ferocious, drumming crescendo.

In just its second year (last year's productions were sellouts), the Owen/Cox production succeeds because each element is top-notch, from the dancers to the music to the bright, polka-dot costumes. It seems poised to become a classic in its own way as the production's fans spread the word.

**ce group, pianist Kairy
Koshoeva, present
world premiere of
“Goldberg Variations”**

By Libby Hanssen, Special to the
Kansas City Star

June 9, 2013

The Owen/Cox Dance Group, with pianist Kairy Koshoeva, concluded their season with the world premiere of a delightfully inventive evening-length ballet set to J. S. Bach’s “Goldberg Variations,” performed in the University of Missouri-Kansas City’s White Hall.

“The Goldberg Variations,” one of Bach’s monumental keyboard works, consists of an aria and its thirty variations. It is a testament of endurance, technical ability, theoretical understanding and interpretation for the performer.

Koshoeva displayed warmth, versatility and a considered understanding of the structure and demands of this presentation, with clearly delineated melodies and diverse emotional characteristics. She performed this challenging work with fluency and an easy grace.

Choreographer and co-artistic director Jennifer Owen based the movement on the music’s intricate theoretical structure and delicate ornaments. Owen’s idiosyncratic vocabulary refreshingly

tions. Phrases turned from graceful to thorny within a beat, and she worked whimsical asides (such as high-fives, shimmies, and jaunty kicks) into otherwise conventional lines. She also created vignettes within an overall abstract treatment, with dancers’ sweetly romancing, or strutting like preening peacocks, or reenacting schoolyard jealousies, tantrums, and clichés.

Most of the variations used small groups or pairings, suited to the piece’s intimate nature and canonic phrasing. The two ensemble pieces served as miniature finales: Variation 14 recapped the first portion, with a madcap pace and expansive, whirling arms, and Variation 30 “Quodlibet” was a stately court dance of measured steps and unison turns.

The performance level was high throughout, with many of the dancers also members of the Kansas City Ballet. Notable performances were the men’s quartet in Variation 10, Geoffrey Kropp with Owen in Variation 18’s follow-the-leader, the buoyant gesture and vertical energy of Variation 24 and the sensitive partnering of Michael Davis with Sarah Chun.

Variation 25, the work’s heavily-chromatic emotional peak, was stunning and gently controlled, as a quintet featuring Owen, Allyson Ashley, Juliana Bicki, Christen Edwards, and Logan Pachciarz.

The ballet relied on spare but elegant design elements. The dancers wore simple costumes, designed by Lily

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ards with short, gauzy skirts or leggings, colored in an array of muted jewel-tones: opal, jade, amethyst and garnet. The stage was subtly lit, with primarily sidelight on the dancers and a spotlight always on Koshoeva, who performed downstage right, facing center. Lighting design by Rachael Shair also included color variances on the backdrop ranging from slate to bronze to mauve, contributing to the dusky, dreamy presentation.