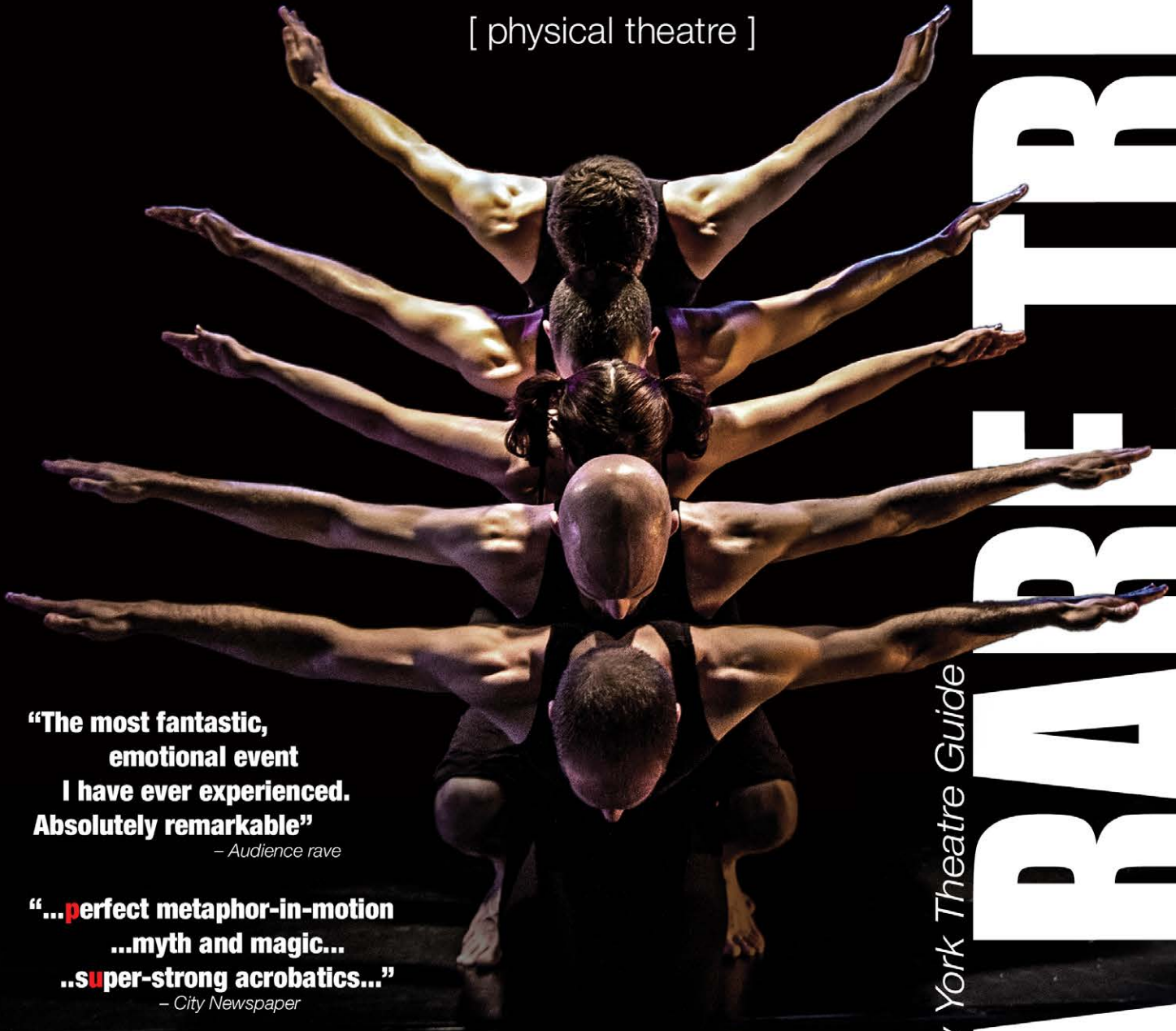


**pu
sh.**

[physical theatre]



**“The most fantastic,
emotional event
I have ever experienced.
Absolutely remarkable”**
– Audience rave

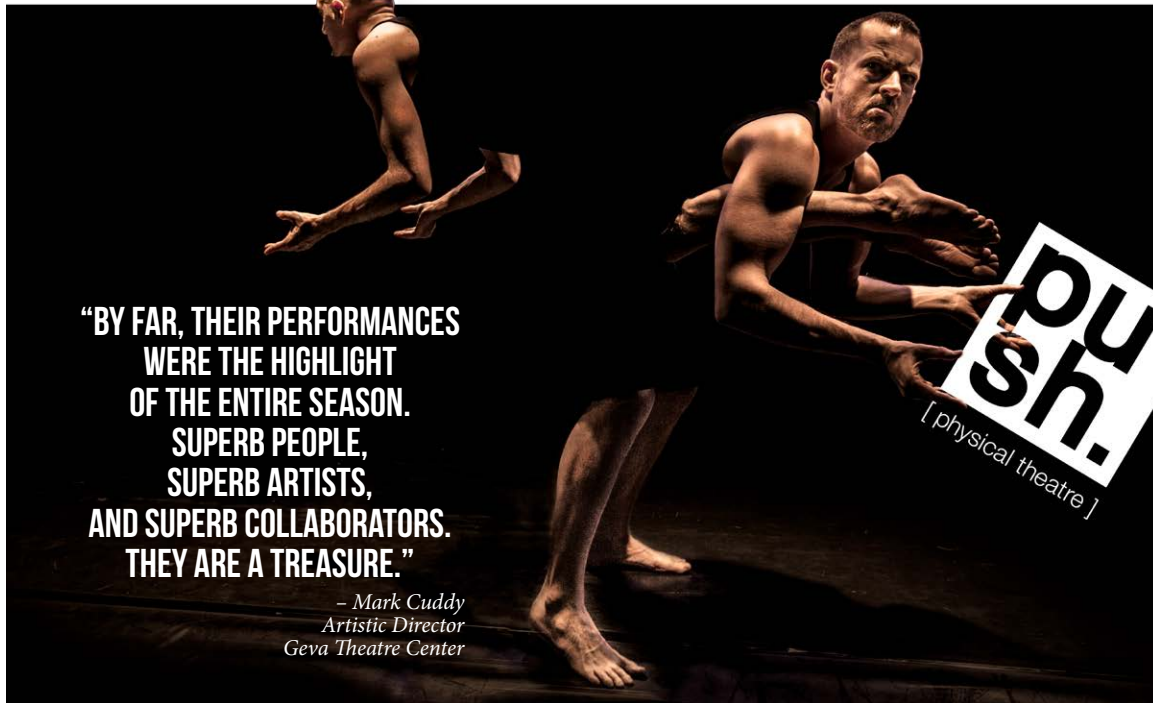
**“...perfect metaphor-in-motion
...myth and magic...
..super-strong acrobatics...”**
– City Newspaper

“...emphas^{is} on the awe.”
– New York Theatre Guide

“It was amazing...the star of the night!”
– Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas, TLC

– New York Theatre Guide

“A BARBECUE”



“BY FAR, THEIR PERFORMANCES
WERE THE HIGHLIGHT
OF THE ENTIRE SEASON.
SUPERB PEOPLE,
SUPERB ARTISTS,
AND SUPERB COLLABORATORS.
THEY ARE A TREASURE.”

– Mark Cuddy
Artistic Director
Geva Theatre Center

POWERFUL. PROVOKING. PUSH.



[physical theatre]

It's untheatre.

Intense athleticism, gravity-defying acrobatics, and soulful artistry are the trademarks of award winning, genre-defining PUSH Physical Theatre. Founded in Rochester, NY in 2000 by husband-and-wife team, Darren and Heather Stevenson, out of a desire to “push” the boundaries of conventional theatre, PUSH has since earned an international reputation as one of the U.S.’s leading physical theatre companies.

Recently featured in acclaimed collaborations with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, the Ying Quartet, and Pulitzer Prize-nominated composer Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon’s two multi-media operas (*Comala* and *No Se Culpe* with fellow composer

Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez), PUSH has also produced its own full-length works including *DRACULA*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, and *Arc of Ages*. Additionally, its wide-ranging repertory includes many shorter works such as “Red Ball,” a hilarious take on the interplay between the real and virtual worlds using iPad technology.

PUSH was a season finalist on TruTV’s national series, *Fake Off*, a competition/reality show featuring what producers dubbed “the captivating art of ‘faking’” – a mix of theatre, acrobatics, and illusion. Their performances caused judge and Glee star Harry Shum Jr. to exclaim: “You guys are superhuman!”

These masters of physical storytelling have received the Community of Color/Anton Germano Dance Award, the Performing Artist of the Year Award from the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester, and the University of Rochester’s Lillian Fairchild Award.

In addition to a busy touring schedule, PUSH is passionate about arts-in-education programs and runs its own summer day camp for kids, teen training, and summer intensive for adult students from all over the world.

Ready?

DARREN & HEATHER STEVENSON (*founding artistic directors/PUSHers*) Born and raised in England, Darren met New Jersey native Heather during their mutual studies at The Center in St. Louis. Their shared love of theatre and performing planted the seeds for their relationship and eventual collaboration.

PUSH PERFORMER BIOS

After founding the Studio School of the Arts in Atlanta, Georgia, the couple relocated to Rochester, NY with their two children in 2000. There, they created PUSH Physical Theatre, growing it over the next 18 years into the international touring company that it is today.

The Stevensons received the 2009 Performing Artist of the Year Award from the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester, the Community of Color/Anton Germano Dance Award, and the University of Rochester's Lillian Fairchild Award in 2017 for PUSH's collaborative work on a multi-media opera that brought together U.S. and Mexican artists.

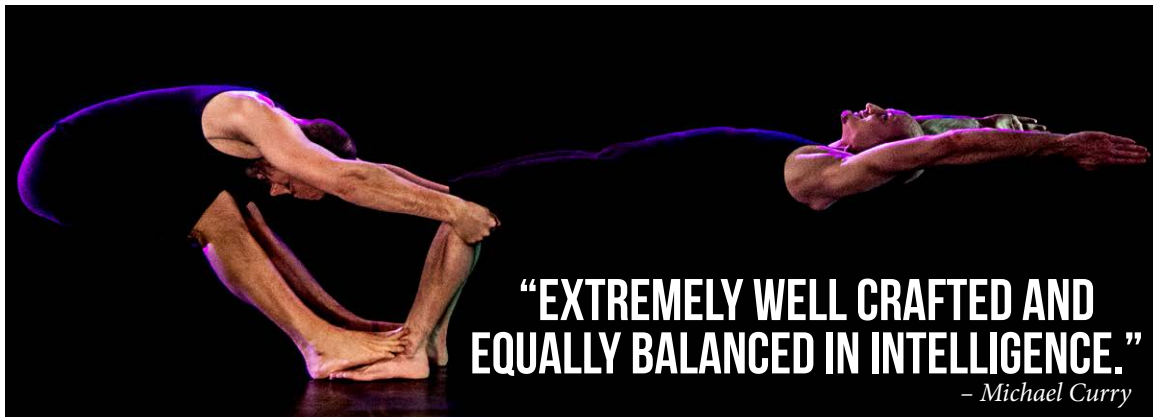
Cross-genre collaborations with other world-renowned artists are becoming more and more frequent for the genre-defining company, such as its recent partnerships with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and the Ying Quartet.

JAMES CUNNINGHAM (*Lighting Designer/Technical Director*) owns and operates Rockshow Lighting, a concert lighting design company providing design and staffing for music festivals, touring acts, and venues. Recent adventures include multiple national tours with folk-rock act Carbon Leaf, international runs with pop-reggae act SOJA, and festival stage designs and staffing for FloydFest and Red Wing Roots. James uses the grandMA2 console line for lighting control, and employs Resolume Arena for video playback and live effects.

ALEXIS GAETANO (*PUSHer*) has studied performing arts for 25 years under the direction of many talented teachers. She is the Artistic Director of Rochester based dance company, Mossa Dance. Her company has performed locally and throughout the United States and she has conceptualized and directed 15 original full length ballets as well as countless other standalone pieces. Her work has been featured in The Rochester Fringe Festival, The Susan B. Anthony Women's Rights Bicentennial celebrations, The Mrs. New York Pageant, as well as numerous concert, community, and charitable events. She has been a guest performer with Genesee Dance Theatre and PUSH Physical Theatre. Prior to starting her company, Alexis was the Founding Owner and Artistic Director of Mossa School of Dance, which she opened at the age of 19. She has been a dance educator and choreographer for 14 years.

ASHLEY JONES (*PUSHer*) is a physical performer, actor, and deviser. After earning his BA European Theatre Arts from Rose Buford College, London and training in Physical Theatre at Academia Teatro Dimitri in Switzerland, he went on to train with Phillippe Gaulier and Angela De Castro in theatrical clowning. Ashley worked and trained with UK-based theatre companies Gecko Physical Theatre, Nonsuch Theatre, and Frantic Assembly. Recent credits include: *The Party's Over* (2017), *Eclipse* (2017), *The Russian Play* (2017) and *Into the Clouds* (2018). As Artistic Director of Theatre Kinaesthetic, Ashley explores physical modalities within ensemble and devised performance including *Rite of Passage* (2015, 2016).

SYDNEY BURROWS (*PUSHer*), originally from Rochester, NY, earned her BA in Dance and English from Goucher College and studied dance and physical theater at Accademia Dell'Arte in Arezzo, Italy. In addition to working for the University of Rochester as a Digital Strategist, Sydney is a freelance dancer and Assistant Editor for DIYdancer, an international online and print dance magazine.



RECOMMENDATION LETTERS



Castleton

We were fortunate to host a visit from PUSH Physical Theatre at Castleton University in October 2016 as part of our 2016-2017 season, during which they also provided a physical theatre workshop for our theatre majors and a behind-the-scenes look at their working process as part of our undergraduate liberal arts program called Soundings. When I became Director of the Fine Arts Center at Castleton in 2013, I found a facility and programming schedule in dire need of rejuvenation and have undertaken a comprehensive restructuring designed to provide more diverse, challenging, and innovative arts experiences for our students and community at large. In PUSH, we found the perfect artists to make this idea manifest. Their ability to work across traditional aesthetic and communicative lines in order to reach a wide spectrum of audience members is unparalleled, as is the pure enthusiasm with which they approach both process and performance.

In only three hours, they were able to provide our undergraduate theatre students with an approach to physical acting that was described by one attendee as “utterly life-changing.” Their presentation to our liberal arts students from a variety of academic disciplines was able not only to give the students a glimpse into the process of developing physical theatre through group improvisation but also to extrapolate this to a lively discussion of the importance of being able to respond to life’s challenges by “saying yes” and embracing them. The workshop was truly inspirational to this group, many members of which have historically had difficulty making connections between the arts and their own lives. Finally, their formal concert frankly turned the theatre on its head as PUSH presented a series of pieces that in turn made the audience laugh, cry, gasp, and, most importantly--think.

It’s fair to say that PUSH’s visit was a turning point in our initiative to strengthen the arts at Castleton. We can’t wait to have them back!

Sincerely,
Rich Cowden
Assistant Professor, Director of Fine Arts Center
Castleton University



FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Hi Robin,

What a great week for the Arts in Fairfield! As you know, we’ve been so excited to welcome PUSH Physical Theatre to our schools. They were at my boys’ school today and the response was exceptional. One student described their performance as “one million out of five” and another as “A-MAZING”! I would agree--it was an extraordinary performance all-around!

It is such a pleasure to work with Darren, Heather, and their team. They have been extremely professional and flexible in their approach, which is a key combination when working in a school environment! They are also gifted educators and are really wonderful in engaging the kids outside (before and after) the performances. We’re looking forward to 5 more days of PUSH!

Thanks so much for your help!

Best,
Carol Guernsey
Fairfield PTA Council



After your performance, a member of the audience made a comment that I came to hear over and over again throughout the following week: “PUSH made me laugh, they made me cry, they were just amazing! Are you going to bring them back next year?”

I am grateful for your attentiveness to the theme of the festival. PUSH so aptly and movingly explored the human condition or what I like to call “the universal condition.” The emotions, paradoxes and conflict we face as humans and that you explore through physical theater provides a mirror to illuminate our own values.

Bravo to you, PUSH Physical Theater. I was happy to join the Jackson Hole audience in their standing ovation to you. Your art form transcends the banality of our everyday actions and thoughts. You took us outside of ourselves to show us a bigger picture of the world we live in.

Thank you very much. I look forward to future collaborations.

Sincerely,
Marylee White
JH Wild Festival Director

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS



It is with great pleasure that I am writing about and recommending PUSH Physical Theatre.

After planning and implementing the residencies, almost 2000 students (over 6 performances) and their dozens of teachers saw the performance. The quality was spot on and magnificent. Students and teachers were enthralled at the dance and movement. They made the many learning connections we had planned for and more. Each segment was introduced by Mr. Stevenson who identified the art as well as the possible content connections. Additionally, during the Q&A at the end of the performance, Mr. Stephenson fielded the students' questions with depth and sensitivity. I can't tell you how pleased I was at the complexity of his understanding of both his art and the students in the audience.

I highly recommend PUSH Physical Theatre for the depth and breadth of their artistic capacities as well as the direct and inferred connections to student learning. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Best regards,
Carol D. Brown
Administrative Coordinator,
Arts in Education & Exploratory Enrichment



This letter serves as an unqualified recommendation for Darren, Heather and the PUSH company.

The troupe gave a thrilling and artful performance and workshop to three, very diverse audiences, including a free showing for our local elementary and middle school students. PUSH was open and flexible to our programming and master class needs, and adapted their storytelling specifically for each audience. Their incredible experience, practice and skill showed through in their performances, and our programming for the year benefited from their imaginative contribution.

From first booking to the final performance, PUSH was open, communicative and professional. They were easy to work with, flexible, and engaging. We will be happy to have them back again, and we would recommend them highly for a performance or a workshop.

Sincerely,
Alli Crandell
Edwards College of Humanities and Fine Arts
Coastal Carolina University

This letter should serve as an unqualified rave for the nimble and innovative PUSH Physical Theatre Company.

By far, their performances of their repertory were the highlight of the entire season – so much so that I invited them back this year to perform alone in our regular Nextstage season: the only company I did so.

Their work incorporates humor, pathos, musicality, character, and theme. They only create a piece if they have a question to explore, and any answers come out of their collaborative rehearsals. I was deeply involved in their rehearsal of a piece we commissioned from them after the Theatre-Fest performances so I know first-hand their process. I had asked them to create a wordless “announcement” of all ten plays that we would be producing – sort of a collage of scenarios inspired by our selections. They performed this at our annual subscriber night when I unveiled the new season...and again they stole the show. Good thing I didn't have to follow them.

In short, Darren and Heather are superb people, superb artists, and superb collaborators. We are blessed to have them in our community though I am hopeful that they have an opportunity to reach audiences outside Western New York, too. They are a treasure.

Regards,
Mark Cuddy
Artistic Director
Geva Theatre Center



Their innovative vision of bringing dance to communities and populations that broaden the understanding and definition of dance movement and visual theatre continues to amaze and inspire audiences, sponsors and colleagues wherever they go. The level of aesthetic and artistic quality that PUSH produces – not only within their company but in the students they work with – is an astounding feat.

I have been able to observe their unique ability to work with and teach a wide variety of students from a myriad of backgrounds, abilities and ages. Their expertise is not merely in their breadth of knowledge and intimate understanding of dance, music, theatre, mime and the arts of nonverbal communication but as exceptional educators as well.

Most Sincerely,
Thomas Warfield
Director
RIT/NTID Dance Company

CURRENT REPERTOIRE

BREAKING BOUNDS (2018, EVENING LENGTH)

The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and PUSH collaboration with Grammy-winner, Jeff Tyzik, featured original compositions and audience favorites.

DRACULA (2017, EVENING LENGTH)

Will you let him in? Can you keep him out? The acrobatic spectacle from the masters of motion theatre touring for the 2018/19 season.

O'S & I'S (2016)

PUSH integrates flashlights, wearable video projectors and their bodies to explore the interplay between virtual and physical reality, what "intelligence" means in a binary society of being pushed to the outside (the zeros) or accepted into the inside (the ones).

JEKYLL & HYDE (2016, EVENING LENGTH)

Dr. Henry Jekyll delves into the exotic – his own psyche – ripping himself apart, piece by piece-emptying out the villainy within, creating another creature, the broken and mangled Edward Hyde. Gutted of guilt and conscience, Hyde is free to commit the sins Jekyll is too civilized to comprehend.

STRANGERS (2014)

Exploring human relationships and missed connections in a rapidly changing world. Made possible by a generous grant from the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

RED BALL (2013)

Funded by a (\$28,000) grant from the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation, 'PUSHinterPLAY' was born as a collaboration with students and faculty from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (at Rochester Institute of Technology) to explore the interplay between virtual and physical reality and communication. "Red Ball" was inspired by the use of iPads and other digital devices to create on-stage adventures for electronic characters.

WEB (2012)

Aggression is a universal challenge. For every person who dies as a result of violence, many more are injured and suffer from a range of physical and mental health problems. Survivors often find themselves emotionally tied to their aggressors years after the physical incident. Made possible in part by generous donations from The Puffin Foundation, The Rochester Area Community Foundation, and the Arts and Cultural Council for Greater Rochester.

EVOLUTION OF AVIATION (2012)

A tongue-in-cheek reinterpretation of the history of human flight through the lens of biological/evolutionary processes.

THE NATURAL WORLD (2011)

What does it look like – literally – to give someone a hand? Physical illusions and gravity-defying, acrobatic high jinks show us how. The ramifications of kindness, respect, conflict, friendship, and more are discovered by a community of fantastical creatures created from the performers' bodies. Meet The Two Headed Bug, The Scorpion and the playful Squat Frogs.

GRACE (2007)

Often when grace is most present in our lives, we are most oblivious to it. Accepting help – whether from mentors, strangers or of a more spiritual kind – can be a humbling and sometimes difficult experience. A simple act of kindness is a powerful thing.

JOURNEY (2007)

An exploration of long-term relationships. Commitment – even when it feels broken down, worn out, even aimless – is sometimes enough to carry us through. *Journey* was created as a collaboration between the choreographer, the performers, the poets and the musician.

GALILEO (2003)

Originally choreographed for composer Glenn McClure's oratorio, *The Starry Messenger*, this piece in an homage to Galileo's discovery of the heliocentric universe. It premiered with Rochester chamber choir, Madrigalia, and was inspired by the *New York Times* best seller, *Galileo's Daughter*, by Dava Sobel. This work was made possible by a generous grant from The Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester.

PARENTHOOD (1996)

Based on the lives of the choreographers, *Parenthood* almost didn't make it to the stage. It was created when Darren and Heather's two children were an infant and toddler during a near-hallucinogenic haze caused by lack of sleep and parental frustration. The choreographers just couldn't see the funny side at the time.

THE SOLDIER (1995)

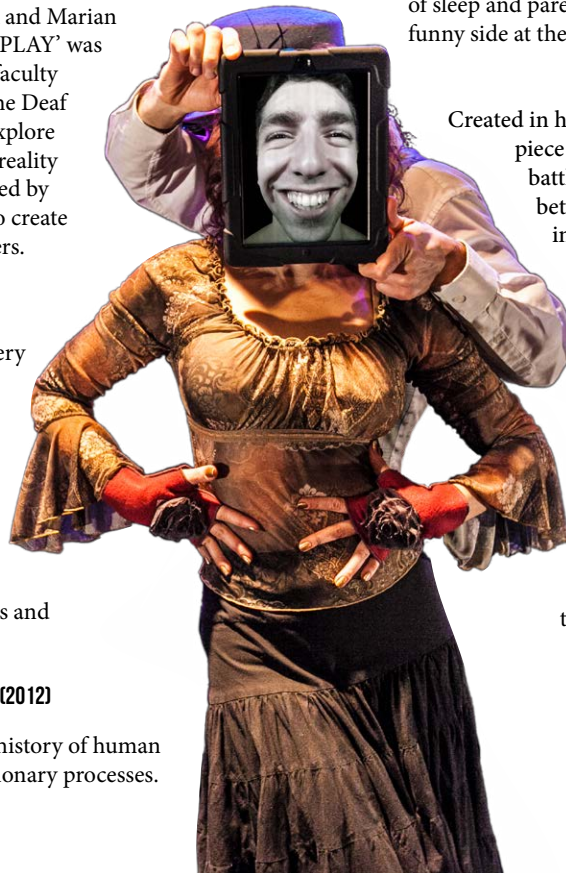
Created in honor of the British holiday, Remembrance Sunday, this piece follows a young man from his bedroom and home to the battlefield. The work was the result of a study of the parallels between play and war, and is dedicated to the sacrifice of innocence and life by the men and women of the armed forces.

BALLOON ANIMALS (1994)

An exploration of the wonder of childhood and the frustration of trying to blow up balloons.

THE VISIT (1993)

During college, the choreographer had the opportunity to work at a nursing home. She made friends with a resident, Anna, who suffered from Parkinson's disease. The "Visit" imagines Anna's daughter and granddaughter spending time with Anna.



Like 0 Pin It Share

Casey reviews PUSH Physical Theatre

By Casey Carlsen

PUSH Physical Theatre, the brainchild of artistic directors and founders Darren and Heather Stevenson, has a satisfying repertoire built from the local company's 16 years in existence, but it's always exciting to see a new piece. The Fringe audience Saturday night at the School of the Arts' main stage was shown the world premiere of "0's and 1's," a work still in progress.

Darren prefaced the performance of the piece with a brief talk about national and political identity in the world. "I just feel like maybe, if we could do a few more silly things ... and a little less hating and shooting ..." he said.

Light and the absence of light contribute greatly to an aura of menace that imbues most of this piece. Performers wear portable video projectors and flashlights, which initially, spookily illuminate their faces and leotard-clad bodies; by the end, scattered colored light from the projectors ushers in a lighter mood -- hope, perhaps peace.

The piece has a high-tech, calculated feel, but at the same time, a primitive, elemental side. For much of it, the performers are enmeshed together or alone in large pieces of a shiny, stretchy fabric. Bodies struggle inside. Black fabric covers faces. Then hands and feet protrude. Eventually, the fabric is discarded, the movement becomes more upward bound, and the music is more optimistic.

PUSH excels in deeply layered work that grows richer in meaning with repeated viewings. This is one such piece. I look forward to seeing it again to gain further insight into its message.

The company is, however, equally adept at conveying humor and lightness through movement. Saturday night's program was balanced between dark and light. "Parenthood," for example, a hysterical take on beleaguered parenting, had the audience chuckling as the Stevensons mimed an exhausted couple woken repeatedly to attend their young children. The genius of the company's physical comedy is readily apparent as the two take turns shuffling off to burp and change the babies -- all made clear without any props, only movement and facial expression.

The other two pieces performed Saturday -- "Job" and "The Soldier" -- are both hard-hitting. "Job" takes its name from the biblical character and delivers a powerful rendition of his anguish. The action centers on an immense metal ring that the performers clamber in and out of as they fight their way to some kind of freedom. AviPryntz-Nadworny demonstrates his prowess with this apparatus (he has performed with Cirque de Soleil) as the title character trying to master his demons.

"The Soldier" features Darren progressing from a boy at play to a soldier in battle. His expressions during his slow motion war scenes are, alone, worth attending the show. He fires his gun and his face contorts in agony and disbelief. Then, it appears he is hit. Red light floods the stage floor. He staggers, his body flaying, he falls, contorts, stills, and then the stage goes black.



**“A THRILLING AND
ARTFUL PERFORMANCE.”**

– Alli Crandell, Coastal Carolina University

Dance



PUSH Physical Theatre and Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra will perform collaborative new works this week. PHOTO BY ERICH CAMPING

Come together

“Breaking Boundaries with PUSH Physical Theatre”

FRIDAY APRIL 13,
AND SATURDAY, APRIL 14, AT 8 P.M.
KODAK HALL AT EASTMAN THEATRE,
60 GIBBS STREET
\$24-\$110 454-2100;
RPO.ORG; PUSHTHEATRE.ORG

[PREVIEW] BY DANIEL J. KUSHNER

On the surface, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra's upcoming collaboration on April 13 and 14 with the nearly undefinable local performance troupe PUSH Physical Theatre may seem like nothing new. The RPO has long worked with performers from other artistic mediums, including movement-based groups as varied as the Rochester City Ballet and Cirque de la Symphonie. But in actuality, this program — entitled “Breaking Boundaries with PUSH Physical Theatre” — is all about subtle innovations that find both the musicians and stage performers presenting their craft in new contexts.

Though the initial approach to this collaboration was open-ended, Darren Stevenson, co-Artistic Director of PUSH Physical Theatre, was clear about the direction he wanted to avoid. “There is this thing that sometimes happens where we say that we’re collaborating,” Stevenson explains. “What’s actually happening is the musicians are onstage playing something and the dancers are onstage dancing something. We just happen to be doing it at the same time. And we call it a collaboration. And that’s great for writing grants and everything, and we all feel good about it, but did we really collaborate?”

This attitude toward the program resonated with RPO Pops Conductor Jeff Tyzik, and a more organic brainstorming for how the music and movement would converge was the result. “It’s just opened my eyes to thinking about how we program concerts in a totally different way,” Tyzik says.

What makes the meeting of PUSH and the RPO dynamic is the creation of new work. In addition to bringing some of his existing compositions to the program — which will focus on the concept of

journeys, both personal and universal — Tyzik has composed new music for PUSH’s work, “Galileo.”

For the first time, PUSH co-Artistic Director Heather Stevenson will perform her signature solo piece “The Visit” with musical accompaniment, Tyzik’s “Memory” from his orchestral cycle “Images: Musical Impressions of an Art Museum.” The conductor will also present his composition “Blue Funk,” with the members of PUSH portraying primordial beings that emerge from the ocean.

“I am fond of the idea that things don’t change that much, we just think they do,” Stevenson says. “We’re kind of concerned with the same sorts of things as everyone else is, and everyone else has always been. So these little creatures, they’re slithering around, you know, one of them figures out how to walk, and the others wanna walk. And they have little conflicts with each other, and they wanna know ‘Who is my friend and who am I fighting?’”

Stevenson and PUSH — a group whose creative experiments with movement place them somewhere between where traditional dance ends

and performance art begins — brought a paradigm-shifting concept to collaborative process. “When you’re improvising, and you’re lifting someone, they’re lifting you, and you’re dancing together in physical contact,” Stevenson says. “You’re trying to think of that in terms of there being three parties: there’s me and you, and there’s the movement, as if the movement is another person.”

Stevenson acknowledges that trying to answer the question “What does the movement want to do?” is not always a sure-success. “It doesn’t always work, but when you fall into those moments, it’s like magic,” he says. “It’s meditative, in that for one moment, you’re not planning for the future, you’re not evaluating the past. You’re right in the moment.”

Perhaps the most intriguing and potentially risky part of the collaborative performance will be a live improvisation between RPO trumpeter Herb Smith and the members of PUSH. In it, the previously mentioned primordial life forms will physically interact with Smith, who will play the god figure that they worship.

“So in this piece, we said, ‘OK, so God can only communicate through the trumpet, and we can only communicate through movement, and so how do we understand each other?’” Stevenson says.

As a joint effort, “Breaking Boundaries” is distinctive. On the one hand, PUSH Physical Theatre embodies not merely characters, but also the environment of the characters, the sense of space that environment implies. Stevenson explains: “What I’m trying to do is say, ‘What in the entire universe of possible movements is the right way to transmit this idea the best?’”

For its part, the RPO’s willingness to present both new works and canonical classical music (in this case, Samuel Barber’s “Adagio for Strings” and rarer pieces by Zoltán Kodály and Maurice Ravel) in a more unconventional light helps to make these concerts more than just business as usual for orchestral programming.

“I think that really speaks to the future of orchestras,” Tyzik says of the collaboration. “The ones that take chances and keep experimenting are going to have a much better prospect of developing new audiences going forward than the ones that just say, ‘OK, we limit our concerts to Broadway and film music, and whatever these six categories are, and then that’s it. That’s who we are. We sell out and we do really well.’ Well that’s right now. But what about ten years from now?”

Rochester Fringe Festival, Day 3: PUSH Physical Theatre review

ONE OF THE MUST-SEE SHOWS OF THE FRINGE

by Casey Carlsen

A large crowd filled the lobby and looped around the entrance to the TheaterROCS stage at Xerox Auditorium Friday night as people waited patiently for the doors to open for **PUSH Physical Theatre's** first show at Rochester Fringe. I gleaned from snippets of conversation in the rapidly overheating space that many had seen PUSH perform before and were coming back for more. They were, in PUSH parlance, "PUSHERS," as followers are playfully dubbed on the group's website.

Darren and Heather Stevenson founded the group in Rochester in 2000, wanting a vehicle in which to perform and create that embodied not just dance and not just theater, but a host of other disciplines, including mime, gymnastics and acrobatics. In short, it was to encompass whatever physical vocabulary they needed in order to convey what they wanted to express. In fact, the company includes a classically trained actor, Jonathan Lowry; a parkour (climbing urban spaces) instructor, martial arts expert and gymnast, Andrew Salmon; and an actor, juggler, and gymnast from Cirque du Soleil, Avi Pryntz-Nadworny.

The company's first piece last night, the premiere of "The Evolution of Aviation," immediately demonstrated the impact of combining these various forms of movement and expression. The members of PUSH possess a startling ability to transform their bodies into other entities through movement, sound, and expression. Without using any props, the performers became gliders, helicopters, and planes, as well as the pilots of these vehicles. Starting with the basic position of laying stomach to the ground, arms hovering sideways like wings -- the plunky strains of ragtime music establishing the time period - the group progressed to more elaborate depictions of flying machines. A flurry of hands became propellers. A central dancer supported a smaller dancer in the air on either side of him to become a plane's wings. PUSH possesses the beguiling ability to access the inner world of the imagination through physical transformation, that innate gift of early childhood that most of us, sadly, left behind long ago.

The audience responded with resounding enthusiasm throughout the show, bursting into laughter or chuckling with appreciation again and again. In fact, humor and accessibility are part of the group's wide appeal. Unusual for a dance company -- almost unorthodox, in fact -- Darren Stevenson spends substantial time on stage during every show addressing the audience, his truly funny anecdotes and insightful, self-effacing quips chipping away at that limiting wall between performers and their audience.

By far my favorite piece of the evening was the gut-wrenching "Web," a dark departure for the group. The 2011 piece closely examines both the savagery of abuse and violence and its emotional and psychological fall-out. Lowry was superb as the victim, literally harnessed and roped to his torturers who yanked him around and mimicked striking him with ugly sneers on their faces. Lowry's classical background was evident, as finely filtered expressions moved across his face to convey the pain, fear, and bewilderment at the brutality he was enduring. His body was no less expressive than his face. He recoiled again and again as would an animal under attack, each time his resistance fading incrementally. **The most affecting 10 seconds of the night's performance -- in fact, the most affecting 10 seconds of anything I've seen in Fringe so far** -- transpired after the brutes had finally tired of their tormenting, unleashed Lowry and left him, a collapsed heap of humanity. Salmon turned abruptly then and mimed a final fierce jerk in the air. Brilliantly choreographed, Lowry responded as if he were still wearing the rope; his body spasmed up into the air, then collapsed back into itself.

Fringe Festival Day 4: Physical Theatre & Fielder's Choice

By JEFF SPEVAK • SEP 16, 2018



PUSH Physical Theatre

CREDIT JEFF SPEVAK

Rochester's PUSH Physical Theatre has established itself as one of the foundation acts of the [KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival](#). It is essential viewing each year: What amazing stories will it tell, through the simple act of moving one's body?

On Saturday, Day Four of the 11-day festival, PUSH took its audience to laughs, tears, and to the stars. True comedy carries with it elements of poignancy and sadness. And something

grander than the joke.

From a dynamic contemporary dance opening of five white-clad bodies using flashlights in the darkness to emphasize their bodies, with the lights at times seeming to emanate from within their bodies as a life force, the five-member PUSH ensemble turned on the lights for "Red Ball," a piece that had a little bit of everything: The Ministry of Silly Walks, decapitation sight gags and the namesake red ball flitting from iPad to iPad, until it was shot from the sky and exploded to reveal its soul, a firefly to be chased through the night, until gently caught in cupped hands.

Those two pieces were remarkable visual treats. Others were solo works relying solely on movement. For "The Pew," PUSH co-founder Darren Stevenson depicted churchgoers from a child to a dozing man in his interpretation of what audience members were up to as Stevenson's father, a pastor, was preaching. Stevenson hiked up his trousers and aged his face just by expression to turn himself into an old man. But the rubber-bodied physical comedy soon gave way to each churchgoer clutching his heart, having received the message.

PUSH co-founder Heather Stevenson – the two are married – offered a solo piece, "The Visit," a thoughtful, and very moving, interpretation of an elderly woman with Parkinson's being visited by her daughter and granddaughter. Pushing aside the curtains to peer out the window, awaiting their visit, body trembling with disease, then watching out the window as they drive off.

The group, breaking three new members, closed with its remarkable "Galileo," a homage to the astronomer, as they scurried around the stage like the workings of a clock, which the universe is, to chiming music.

Darren Stevenson's commentaries between the pieces often dwelled on the trauma of his recent broken toe: "I could pee myself and not know it, I have so many drugs in my body." But after "The Visit," he reminded older people in the audience to share their valuable experience with younger people. And younger people should seek out the elderly, to learn from that experience.

And "Galileo?" Stevenson said whether you believe in a god or not – and Galileo was imprisoned because he promoted a non-deity version of the movement of the solar system – be good to each other, "because it's the right thing to do."

PUSH returns to the School of the Arts' Main Stage at 7 p.m. Sept. 20 and 7 p.m. Sept. 22. It embarks on a five-city tour next month with its interpretation of *Dracula*, and will perform in Rochester again on March 30 and 31 in a collaboration with The Ying Quartet.

PUSH has performed in theatres, festivals, special events, arts-in-education and residency projects. Audiences ranged from 11,000 at the Blue Cross Arena in Rochester, NY to around 200 for smaller theatres.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

ACTIVITIES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- 🎯 PUSH's acrobatic spectacle *DRACULA* national tour.
- 🎯 Darren Stevenson awarded the Lillian Fairchild Award for the opera *Don't Blame Anyone*.
- 🎯 Collaboration with Grammy-winner Jeff Tyzik and the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra
- 🎯 Collaborations with Grammy-winning Ying Quartet.
- 🎯 Finalist on TruTV's national series, *Fake Off*
- 🎯 Collaboration with composer Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon for his Pulitzer-nominated opera, *Comala*, which resulted in performances in Mexico at the Cervantino Festival and a US tour.
- 🎯 Original, full-length work, *Arc of Ages*, ran for two weeks with an expanded cast of 24 performers.
- 🎯 Residency at Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf to collaborate on the creation and premiere performance of "Red Ball" was supported by a \$28,000 grant from the Farash Foundation.
- 🎯 Darren Stevenson has spoken at TEDx Rochester and several colleges about PUSH's unique artistic process.
- 🎯 PUSH continues to run a year-long training and development program for its professional company as well as the Teen Mentorship program, PUSH Pins Summer Camp for Kids and a Summer Intensive for adults, attracting students from all over the world.

PARTIAL LIST OF VENUES:

THEATRES

The Lincoln Center (Fort Collins, CO)
Organización Para Las Artes (Guatemala)
Degollado Theater (Guadalajara, Mexico)
Festival Internacional Cervantino (Guanajuato, Mexico)
The Symphony Space (New York, NY)
Columbia Theatre (Longview, WA)
The Library Theatre (Birmingham, AL)
Castle Gould Theatre (Sands Point, NY)
Vilar Performing Arts Center (Beaver Creek, CO)
Montbleu Casino Showroom (Lake Tahoe, CA)
The Center for the Arts (Jackson Hole, WY)
Casella Theater (Castleton, VT)
Van Nostrand Theatre (Brentwood, NY)
Michael D. Palm Theatre (Telluride, CO)
Rialto Center for the Arts (Atlanta, GA)
The Miller Outdoor Theatre (Houston, TX)
Eastman School of Music, Kodak Hall (Rochester, NY)
Centro De Bellos Artes (San Juan, Puerto Rico)

Cleveland Convention Center (Cleveland, OH)
Blue Cross Arena (Rochester, NY)
Geva Theater Center (Rochester, NY)
Mechanics Hall (Worcester, MA)
State Theatre (Ithaca, NY)
Rochester Institute of Technology, Panara Theatre (Rochester, NY)

SPECIAL EVENTS

US Classic Gymnastics Championship (Rochester, NY)
Discovering Deaf Worlds (Rochester, NY)
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra (Rochester, NY)
M&T Bank (Buffalo, NY)
Rochester Fringe Festival (Rochester, NY)
Rochester Contemporary Art Center (Rochester, NY)
Chatterbox Club (Rochester, NY)
Rockpointe Church (Detroit, MI)
Temple B'rith Kodesh (Brighton, NY)
Melissa's Living Legacy Foundation (Rochester, NY)
The Strong, National Museum of Play (Rochester, NY)

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Coastal Carolina University (Conway, SC)
SUNY Purchase (Purchase, NY)
Belhaven University (Jackson, MI)
Nazareth College (Rochester, NY)
Roberts Wesleyan College (North Chili, NY)
Cortland University (Cortland, NY)
Buffalo State College (Buffalo, NY)
Genesee Community College (Batavia, NY)
St. John Fisher College (Rochester, NY)
Numerous schools throughout the Northeast US.

TEACHING

International Schools Theatre Association with International Baccalaureate residency (New York, NY)
Annual PUSH Summer Intensive 2001 - Present (Rochester, NY)
Annual PUSH Pins Camp for Kids 2005 - Present (Rochester, NY)
"Artful Aging" Residency with Chili Senior Center (Rochester, NY)
Eagle Hill School (Harwick, MA)
Inlet Dance Theatre (Cleveland, OH)
University of Rochester (Rochester, NY)
School of the Performing Arts (Greece, NY)
The Next Step Workshop (Green Bay, WI)
Greece Community Education Fine Arts Camp (Greece, NY)
University of Rochester (Rochester, NY)
Youth with a Mission (Long Island, NY)
Youth with a Mission (Lake City, MT)
Art Peace (Rochester, NY)
Nazareth College Dance Department (Rochester, NY)
Teens Living With Cancer (Rochester, NY)
Rochester Children's Theatre (Rochester, NY)