

NEWSNOTES DANCE

Janis Brenner & Dancers Presents New York Premieres

Gibney Dance – Agnes Varis Dance Center June 1, 2017

By Mark Kappel

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For its annual New York season, Janis Brenner & Dancers is performing at the Gibney Dance - Agnes Varis Dance Theater from June 1-3, 2017 as part of Gibney Dance's Performance Opportunity Project. Presented were two New York premieres both of which feature Brenner's signature choreography, sentiment, humanity – and also tinged with her special brand of humor where appropriate. Most important is that you will be moved by what you are seeing and experiencing.

The focal point of this engagement is the New York premiere of an ambitious project, a major work choreographed by Janis Brenner, *Once You Are Not A Stranger*, which had its world premiere at the Sarajevo Winter Festival on February 10, 2017.

This work, a collaboration with composer musician Sjetlana Bukvich, costume designer Sue Julien, set designer Eva Petric (Petric also providing designs for projection/video design and photograph collection), and lighting designer Mitchell Bogard, represents another stage in Janis Brenner's artistic maturity as a dance-maker. This work in particular, is an artistic response to the troubled times that have taken over the world as we know it.

Once You Are Not A Stranger is the culmination of the family histories of each of the participating dancers which illuminate lineage and ancestry, and emphasizing that we are one community at a time when people are being displaced all over the world. If there was one note of humor, Brenner, herself states that she is walking in someone else's shoes, and that is a metaphor for her own experiences as well as for others. In *Once You Are Not A Stranger*, Brenner has collaborated with her dancers in the creation of the choreography, combining young and mature artists who contribute to this important piece. Kyla Barkin, DeAndre Cousley, Ruth Howard, Sumaya Jackson, Kristi Ann Schopfer, Aaron Selissen, Brenner herself and composer Svetlana Bukvich all infuse a part of themselves in the performance of this work. The added ingredient is that the piece was performed with live music – including Ms. Brenner as a vocalist.

Also on the program was another one of Ms. Brenner's works making its New York premiere, *Soul River/Blues*, which Ms. Brenner created in collaboration with the Maya Dance Theatre in Singapore.

Inspired by the music of Ry Cooder, and BV Bhatt's "A Meeting by the River" this piece focuses on the significance of water in rituals and as a part of nature. Sometimes nature at its cruelest when devastation is the result. In this piece Brenner evokes the East, while also creating a spiritual and calming atmosphere.

In *Soul River/Blues* dancers Kara Chan, Ruth Howard, Sumaya Jackson, Kristi Ann Schopfer and Aaron Selissen create the mood – and the calm.

In this particular program Janis Brenner sets the tone for our times -- no mean feat in these difficult times, making for a provocative and entertaining program of dance.