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Dworin Dance Troupe Adds Immigration To Its Socially Conscious Repertoire

By CHRISTOPHER ARNOTT
CARNOTT@COURANT.COM | OCT 04, 2018 AT 12:50 PM



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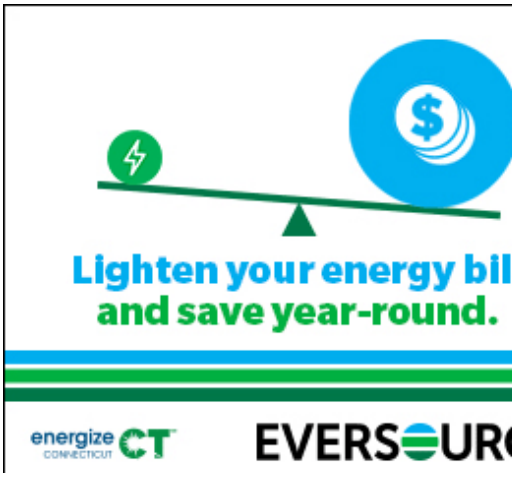

Suitcases are a recurring theme in the Judy Dworin Performance Project's "(US)." "They change throughout the piece," Dworin says. "They suggest uniformity as well as diversity." (Joseph Abad)

'There's the challenge," socially conscious choreographer Judy Dworin says. "How do I make this different from a news story you read on your phone?"

Dworin has staged dance pieces about slavery ("In This House"), incarcerated women ("Brave in a New World"), wrongful prosecution ("The Witching Hour") and other ever-topical social issues. Her latest work, "(US)," has an immigration theme.

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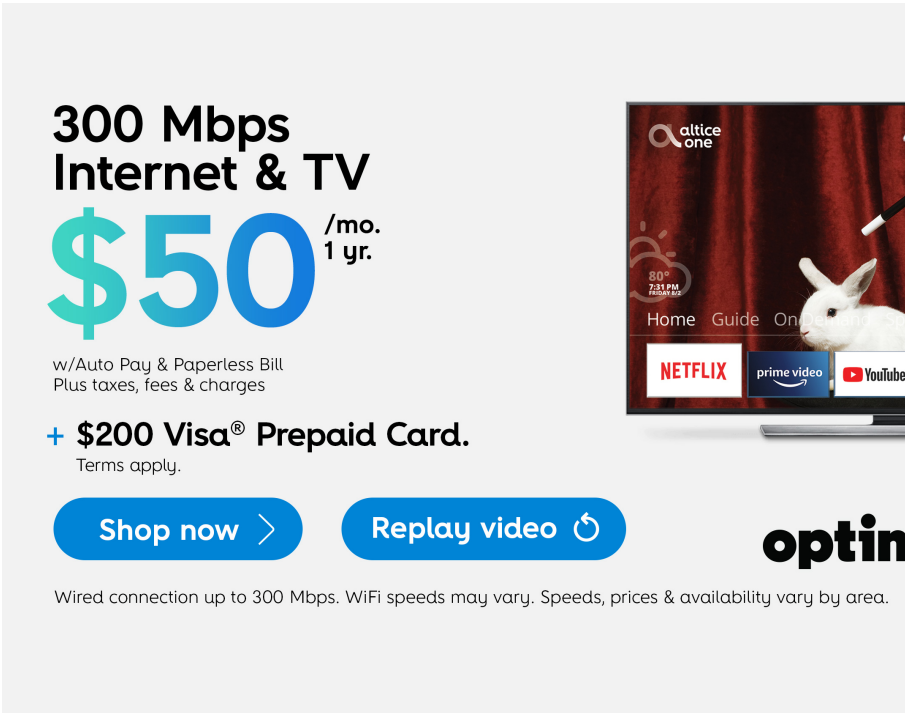

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"The outcome of the [2016 presidential] election made it clear that this was a piece I was going to do," Dworin says. "I wanted this to happen before the midterm elections."

The Judy Dworin Performance Project, a well-established Hartford area dance company that will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year, found a willing collaborator in Hartford Public Library, where "(US)" will be performed Oct. 12 and 13. Dworin calls the HPL "the center for immigration information in Hartford. It seemed like the perfect place."

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"When we moved this to the library it became the site-specific piece it is," Dworin says. The performance uses the library's front entrance way as well as the building's atrium before settling into the library's more traditional performance area.

"The piece is really exploring what some of the important images of immigration really are," Dworin says. As an example, she describes the



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atrium section: “It’s the vantage point, of one person looking down on another, that sense of power.”



From the the atrium, "(US)" explores the concept of "one person looking down on another, that sense of power.” (Joseph Abad)

“(US)” is in three sections. “Arrival,” which is staged at the front of the library; “Wall,” which has the audience on the upper level of the library atrium watching the dancers below; and “Sanctuary,” which takes place in the main auditorium, also known as the Center for Contemporary Culture. The entire work lasts about an hour and a quarter, and the audience is limited to 75. The dance will be revised for a school performance in March and then likely go on tour.

Suitcases are a recurring theme in the dances.

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"They change throughout the piece," Dworin says. "They suggest uniformity as well as diversity. Each suitcase has a different story. Sometimes they become walls. They represent the journey. Each of them has the look of having gone through a lot of experiences."

"You see [the seven dancers] separately, isolated. Then they become a community. ... It took a while to find the essence of what this piece could say, that was fresh and could be hopeful," Dworin says.

The "soundscore" for "(US)," composed by Ritz Ubides, includes pre-recorded music as well as spoken word segments drawn from "a range of voices," Dworin says. The visual design is by Marcella Otzéiza. Kathy Borteck Gersten, associate artistic director of the Judy Dworin Performance Project, co-directed "(US)".



Judy Dworin Performance Project's "(US)" is performed at Hartford Public Library Oct. 12 and 13. (Joseph Abad)

Hartford Public Library CEO Bridget Quinn-Carey has encouraged artistic pursuits in the library but calls “(US)” “really different. It’s like nothing I’ve ever seen in a library before.

“This library,” Quinn-Carey says, “is definitely an organization where immigrants and refugees feel safe, a place where they can come and get reliable information. We want to be that place.”

HPL is one of only two libraries in the U.S. that is approved by the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Immigration Appeals to provide information about citizenship and other immigrant issues, she says. The library also offers English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and a Career Pathways initiative that helps immigrants find work.

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Quinn-Carey says the open rehearsals show "how receptive people are to having performances in the library. It adds a whole new dimension, different viewpoints and vantage points."

"I love that Judy came to us with this concept. The library is a place of inclusion, a place of refuge and a place to find opportunities. I thought it was a fantastic idea. I would absolutely do something like this again."

THE JUDY DWORIN PERFORMANCE PROJECTS "(US)" *is performed at the Hartford Public Lilbrary Oct. 12 at 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; and and Oct. 13 at 6 p.m. Tickets are $25.* **judydworin.org**.



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(Joan Marcus)

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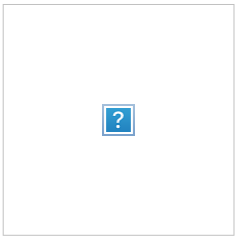

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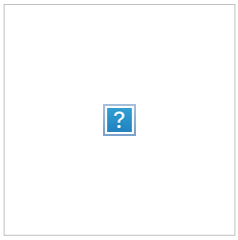

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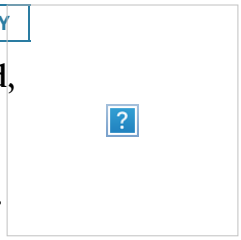

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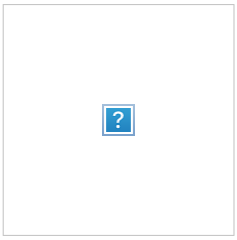

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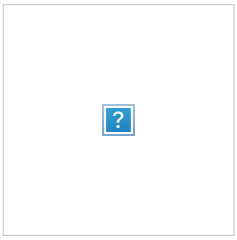

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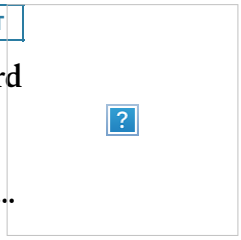

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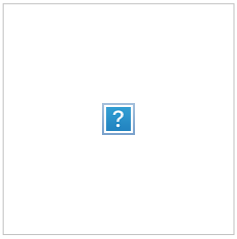

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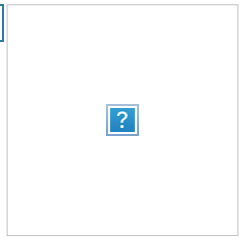

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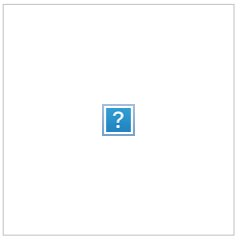

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