2016-2017 Season Brochure

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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PERFORMANCES 16/17

Raphaëlle Boitel
Imagination Takes Flight

Deborah Hay
Puts out to Sea
with Laurie Anderson

Abbey Theatre
Stages a Revolution

The Haunting of
David T. Little

Richard Alston’s
South Asian Inspiration

William Bolcom
Headlines
All Terrain String Festival

Don Quixote
Rides Again

Doug Elkins’s
Favorite Things

Astrid Hadad
Aztec Song Siren
If theater to you is sustenance, if you are the sort of person who savors the daring and the visionary, then head to New Jersey ... [for] the invaluable Peak Performances series at the Alexander Kasser Theater.

—Laura Collins-Hughes, The New York Times
Dear Friend,

Peak Performances has a mandate to offer work by exceptional artists who break the mold, so to speak. Taking our cue from the artists we present, this season we’ve departed from the traditional sales brochure in favor of something more like a magazine. In tandem with the standard pitch for each show, you will read engaging articles by very smart writers like Wendy Perron, Ronni Reich, and Manny Igrejas.

What is the back story, you might ask? I believe that the more you know about Peak performers the better your experience will be at the Kasser. Without putting too fine a point on the dilemma, arts coverage in the media is dwindling, and if you are a Peak patron, content is in short supply.

With that in mind, this 16/17 Peak brochure is a hybrid: a sales tool and a magazine of ideas. I urge you to dig in and learn more about the remarkable work of the extraordinary artists represented this season.

And then, by all means, go to the Peak Performances website to purchase your tickets for another season of “daring” and “visionary” performances at the Alexander Kasser Theater.

Sincerely,

Jedediah Wheeler
Executive Director
Arts and Cultural Programming
Montclair State University

In January 2016, Peak Performances executive director Jedediah Wheeler was honored by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters at its annual conference in New York. He received the William Dawson Award for Programmatic Excellence and Sustained Achievement in Programming during his 40-year career as a presenter and producer. Choreographer Elizabeth Streb introduced Wheeler at the ceremony, saying he “invented a new multilingual dictionary for the eye ... [he] rejiggered and reengineered how our hearts ought to respond.”
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All Seats $20

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Programs in this season are made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Dept. of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts; The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Alison and James T. Cirenza; Holly and Robert Gregory; I. Michael Kasser; and The Honorable Mary Mochary.
“A touch of Lynch here, a scent of Kate Bush’s gothic romanticism there, Raphaëlle Boitel has created an epic event ... that will live on in your memory.” —Libération (France)

American Premiere

Raphaëlle Boitel

The Forgotten/
L’Oublié(e)

September 29 – October 2

www.peakperfs.org
American Premiere

RAPHAËLLE BOITEL
THE FORGOTTEN/
L'OUBLIÉ(E)

CONCEPT/DIRECTION
Raphaëlle Boitel

ORIGINAL MUSIC
Arthur Bison

LIGHTING
Hervé Frichet

COSTUMES
Lilou Herin

SOUND
Silvère Boitel/
Sylvain Lafourcade

Production: Compagnie L’Oublié(e)/Si Par Hasard
Co-production: Cirque Théâtre d’Elbeuf – Pôle National des Arts du Cirque de Haute Normandie;
Grand Théâtre de Provence; Etablissement Public du Parc et de la Grande Halle de la Villette; as well as Théâtre de l’Archipel – scène nationale de Perpignan; La Verriere d’Alès – Pôle National Cirque Languedoc-Roussillon; L’Hippodrome – scène nationale de Douai; Théâtre de Cusset – scène conventionnée cirque; La Brèche – Pôle national des arts du cirque de Basse-Normandie/Cherbourg-Octeville dans le cadre du projet PASS; L’Agora – Pôle National des Arts du Cirque Bouilazac Aquitaine; La Coursive – scène nationale de La Rochelle; Le Carré – Les Colonnes, scène conventionnée, Saint Médard-en-Jalles/Blanquefort.

DATES
September 29 & 30 @ 7:30 p.m.
October 1 @ 8:00 p.m.
October 2 @ 3:00 p.m.

RUNNING TIME
60 minutes, no intermission

“...remarkable; they bend, they dance, they swing, they soar impossibly through the air.” – Irish Independent

Raphaëlle Boitel, “one of the most remarkable performers on the European visual and physical theater scene,” makes her directorial debut with The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e). A woman searches for the man she loves. Wandering through the ruins of her memory, she encounters moments of ecstasy, secret dreams, and haunting apparitions. With extraordinary physical prowess, the company of six performers flies, glides, and dives to create a parallel world of startling beauty. The Forgotten plunges you into a dreamlike world of flight and fantasy to tell one woman’s tale of loss, yearning, and discovery.

Engage!

Community Conversation
Saturday, October 1, post-performance
Join Raphaëlle Boitel and her company of artists to share reflections and responses immediately following the show.
Free and open to the public.
At just 32, cirque nouveau star Raphaëlle Boitel is considered circus royalty, touring the world from an early age with James Thiérrée (son of legendary founders of Cirque Imaginaire and Cirque Invisible, Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée, grandson of Charlie Chaplin, great-grandson of Eugene O’Neill) and training with one of the most famous French clowns of all time, Annie Fratellini, descended from the great Fratellini circus dynasty.
With this impressive pedigree, Boitel might have been content to continue performing in Thiérrée’s eye-popping productions or in the Spiegelworld spectacle Désir. Ben Brantley called Boitel’s performance in Désir “truly ravishing,” and reviews for Thiérrée’s The Junebug Symphony praised her as an “alluring and graceful contortionist, acrobat, and trapeze artist.”

But Boitel’s prodigious talent, ambition, and restless spirit led her instead to create her own work that blends theater, dance, music, and circus arts. This new frontier of artistry and expression reflects developments in contemporary circus. According to John Ellingsworth, editor of Sideshow Circus Magazine, “Circus is always on the borders of society. Now it’s on the border of art forms. Something new has been born in an intermingled space where ideas are constantly tested against one another; it takes on elements of dance, martial arts, puppetry, extreme sports, tricking, mime, devised theatre, and countless other forms. But while the approaches are manifold, all the artists are trying to do is find what’s deepest and most fundamental in their art and how best to express it.”

A Family Affair

Growing up in Montauban in southwest France, young Raphaëlle went to the circus with her mother and older brother Camille, and it was love at first sight. She knew she wanted the circus life. The Boitels’ remarkable mother, Lilou, taught her four children to believe they could achieve anything if they worked hard enough. They wanted to train with the great Annie Fratellini at her National Circus School in Paris but did not have money for tuition. Lilou decided the family would work its way north. They piled into a van and lived out of it for the summer. Camille was a juggler; Raphaëlle, a nine-year-old contortionist. They performed on the streets and town squares of seaside towns all along the way, earning their tuition and refining their circus skills.

“Today the circus has been turned inside out … seeking out new collaborators, new directions, yet holding to age-old ideas that were always there under the hot lights and fanfare of circuses past.”

— John Ellingsworth, Sideshow Magazine

Raphaëlle Boitel, Maya Masse, and Lilou Herin in the The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e)
“The truly ravishing Ms. Boitel ... might have sat for Klimt in Vienna.”

—Ben Brantley, The New York Times
in front of appreciative impromptu audiences. It was a magical time for young Raphaëlle and her family. When the Boitels arrived at the National Circus School, they attempted to pay their tuition with the coins they’d earned. Annie Fratellini and her staff were touched and invited them to join the school for free.

The school was the right place for the talented youngsters, and their skills grew exponentially. When Raphaëlle was 12, she was invited to appear in a movie, and there she met James Thiérrée. She and Camille joined Thiérrée’s company, and Lilou became the company’s costume designer. During the 13 years Raphaëlle performed with Thiérrée’s company, she started developing her own show in her mind: The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e).

Forging Her Own Path

Boitel says “The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e) is the first big show I created myself, and I wanted to express something very personal. I drew on my own family’s stories, but not in a literal way. The world of the show is a kind of dream world, so it can feel very intimate and also very universal. It expresses something everyone can relate to. It’s really about being human.”

When The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e) begins, we hear an offstage voice saying, “One day a man was somewhere, waiting for something, and he died but he continued to breathe.” On the shadowy stage we see the stricken man, his doctor, and three women. The rest of this cinematic, acrobatic, circus-theater piece is about the obsessive quest to find this man and how the quest takes on a life of its own.

Boitel uses her breathtaking skills as a contortionist to approach this quest from angles most of us can’t imagine. The result is an impossible-to-categorize, immersive experience powered by stirring original music by Arthur Bison that takes audiences to new, unexpected territory. It is a perfect example of all that contemporary circus can offer. No clowns, no elephants, but it still has, as Ellingsworth says, “everything old: flying, falling, grace, risk, sweat and injury and beauty, and moments of absolute fear. It has the realness of life meeting death. The seconds where time runs slow. And it still has, often if not always, the devil’s virtuosity. Most of all it has the quality of what you least expect. Because today the circus has been turned inside out ... seeking out new collaborators, new directions, yet holding to age-old ideas that were always there under the hot lights and fanfare of circuses past.”

― John Ellingsworth, Sideshow Magazine

Boitel’s inspirations for The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e) include some great forgotten women, including Loïe Fuller and the Countess of Castiglione. Fuller, a pioneer of modern dance and theatrical lighting, graces the iconic 1893 poster for the Folies Bergère, where she performed her signature serpentine dances using billowing gowns and dazzling lighting. The Countess of Castiglione was a great beauty, a mistress of Napoleon III, and a prolific photographic model and art director who recreated events from her life in a series of stunning portraits that are considered the great-great-grandmothers of selfies. Her influence is reflected in the chiaroscuro lighting Boitel employs in The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e).
“Sixty minutes of purity, beauty, and body, done with the total conviction that everything complicated can be said without any words.” —SR Kulturrýtt (Sweden)

American Premiere

Cullberg Ballet

Figure a Sea

Choreography and Direction Deborah Hay

Music and Sound Score Laurie Anderson

October 6 – October 9
American icons Deborah Hay and Laurie Anderson collaborate on a new work performed by the intrepid and impressive Cullberg Ballet. In *Figure a Sea*, dancer and stage form a sea of endless possibilities where nothing happens by chance. Hay, a founding member of the groundbreaking Judson Dance Theater, has created her first large-scale work in many years, set to a sound score by Laurie Anderson and performed by 19 dancers of the Cullberg Ballet. Gliding across the stage, they dissolve, join together, and dissolve again, like waves lapping against the shore.

“Thoughtful, flowing … a very beautiful performance”
— *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden)
Deborah Hay has been a formidable presence in the dance world since the 1960s. Back then she was a member of Judson Dance Theater, the collective in Greenwich Village that demolished the existing rules and expressionist fervor of modern dance. Along with Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, and Steve Paxton, Hay basically redefined choreography for our era.

Like others in dance, music, and theater, Hay was influenced by avant-garde composer John Cage, especially his sense of play. And play is still an essential element her work. Although she speaks about her process with a dead seriousness and even hints at transcendence, she embraces play—with what the body can do, with one’s own impulses, with moments of absurdity.

This mix of solemnity and absurdity does not usually sit well with a ballet company. But Cullberg Ballet is no ordinary ballet troupe. Founded in 1967 by Birgit Cullberg, it was one of the first in Europe to mix modern dance and ballet. From 1981 to 1993 it was directed by Cullberg’s son, the maverick dance-theater choreographer Mats Ek. When Anna Grip reigned as artistic director (2010 to 2014), the company brought in Canadian choreographers Benoît Lachambre and Crystal Pite and performed in parks and museums. It was Grip who invited Deborah Hay to give a two-week workshop in 2013. Current artistic director Gabriel Smeets invited her to create a work for the company. Figure a Sea, with music by Laurie Anderson and a cast of 19 dancers hailing from Europe, Australia, the US, the UK, and South Africa, receives its US premiere at Peak Performances October 6 to 9.

Hay has been living and teaching in Austin, Texas, since 1976, with frequent trips to New York City and Europe. For years she made solos for herself that were disarming in their psychological openness. In 1986, critic Mindy Aloff wrote in Dance Magazine that Hay’s performing “gave one the sense of witnessing pure emotion, serenity to hysteria.”
As she stripped away movements and structures to find the essential qualities of dance, Hay’s view of the art intersected with a vision of a life integrating with a continuous, refined consciousness of changes, motion, and rhythm with all other aspects of daily living. In such a scheme, the outside observer is superfluous. Life is dance and to experience it fully one must not stand outside it.

—Sally Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers (Wesleyan University Press, 1987)
to imagine that that is just an idea you have about yourself. She’s like the genius rug puller!” Upon further thought, he says, “It’s incredibly generous, really, for someone to say, at that point in my career, everything that’s been up until now is just one version of you.”

Hay no longer calls what she does “improvisation.” She prefers the word “choreography” but she clearly has no interest in making up steps. Instead, she poses questions like “What if?” or gives directives and encourages the dancers to respond in as authentic a way as possible. For *Figure a Sea*, some of the questions included the following: “How do you not get seduced by the center of the space? How do you enliven the edges of the space?” Influenced by the recent wave of museum performances, she also asked, “What happens when museums and galleries come onto the stage?” To address this last question, Cullberg’s lighting designer, the much acclaimed Minna Tiikkainen, gave her a white floor to simulate a gallery.

Eva Mohn, an American dancer with Cullberg, says that, considering the attraction of the white space, it’s quite a challenge to stay with the proposed questions. In a phone interview, she told me that Hay brought in the idea of a chess game to suggest a certain kind of strategy. “The joy of it,” said Mohn, “is to try to figure out what the game is inside Deborah’s regime.”

There is no strict unison in *Figure a Sea*, but you will see some clustering when the dancers fall in with each other. This reflects one of Hay’s choreographic tools since her Bessie Award–winning piece *The Match* (2004).

“You’re already in the movement of someone who’s caught your eye, and that’s great to let it happen. I call that matching, as opposed to copying. It’s an essential thing on earth. You’re not even making a choice; it’s happening, and then when you do recognize it, enjoy it.”

The device of matching was part of Hay’s larger question about seeing, which was, as Mohn puts it, “How am I perceiving this, and how does that affect my movement?” Hay’s desire to stretch how we see also applies to the audience. Her advice to viewers of *Figure a Sea*: “Instead of reducing how you see, instead of editing your experience of perception, just keep opening, as you would when looking at a sea. And you can’t hold onto a sea, you can’t grasp a sea. Part of it is just being OK with not grasping.”

She continues: “The body itself is a sea. We think of it as a finite entity ... but we’re a sea of change, a sea is a possibility. *Figure a Sea* is like a sea within a sea to me. Nineteen bodies, nineteen seas.”

Wendy Perron, author of *Through the Eyes of a Dancer*, is on the faculty of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. The former editor in chief of *Dance Magazine*, she now writes commentary at wendyperron.com.

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From *Using the Sky: A Dance* the latest book by Deborah Hay

“Swimming on my back is how I exercise outdoors; thus the sky has become a body of material to notice, especially when there are no clouds, as is often the case where I live. Fairly recently, while I was backstroking, a field of nuanced atmospheric activity came into focus through my application of the question, ‘What if I presume I am served by how I see?’ Was I seeing things because of the question, or was it an actual visible condition I never noticed before? After a few days I associated what I was seeing as a continuation of the sky, and I have been relying on that now pervasive reality to promote a sense of interconnectedness with all there is when I dance.” (Routledge, 2015)
The Abbey production of *The Plough and the Stars* is the greatest production of the play I’ve ever seen.”

—Cahir O’Doherty, *The Irish Voice*

Abbey Theatre

*The Plough and the Stars*

By Sean O’Casey

Directed by Sean Holmes

October 20 – October 23
Set amid the tumult of Ireland’s 1916 Easter Rising, The Plough and the Stars is the story of ordinary lives ripped apart by idealism and revolution. The residents of a Dublin tenement shelter from the violence that sweeps through the city’s streets. A battle that will shape the country’s future rages around them. What kind of Ireland awaits them? When The Plough and the Stars was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1926, the audience rioted. Now considered a masterpiece, this provocative play is essential to our understanding of the forces that rocked Ireland one hundred years ago. Olivier Award—winning director Sean Holmes brings a fresh perspective to Sean O’Casey’s timeless and absorbing masterpiece.

“Th’ time is rotten ripe for revolution.”

SEAN HOLMES

A good play can do something nothing else can do, because it can destabilize you and shift who you are. I think you want to do things that are really visceral and exciting and then people understand why you want to be in the theater.

Photo: Courtesy of the Abbey Theatre

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O’Casey was passionate about improving the living conditions of Dublin’s working class. He joined the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) under the command of James Connolly, a man who shared these socialist views. He also admired Jim Larkin—a fellow campaigner for the rights of the Irish workforce—and in 1911 he joined Larkin’s Irish Transport and General Workers Union. Later, he participated in the famous strike and Lock-out of 1913, a protest against the poor treatment of the working class by the State.

O’Casey disagreed with the nationalist belief espoused by Padraig Pearse and the Irish Volunteers that the Irish public should sacrifice itself to defend the state from British rule. When the ICA joined with the Volunteers, O’Casey isolated himself from the organization. In 1919 he published *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army.* In it he wrote that their headquarters were “no longer the Headquarters of the Irish Labour movement, but the centre of Irish national disaffection.”

According to activist Cathleen O’Neill, O’Casey’s personal and political experiences ensured that he knew “first-hand the daily struggles of women in the tenements as they strove to keep their families fed and sheltered, and the misery of men locked out of their jobs for daring to join a trade union and seek better pay. He despaired as the Catholic Church allied itself alongside the bosses and

“*The artist’s life is to be where life is, active life, found in neither ivory tower nor concrete shelter; he must be out listening to everything, looking at everything, and thinking it all out afterward.*”

—Sean O’Casey

headquarters were “no longer the Headquarters of the Irish Labour movement, but the centre of Irish national disaffection.”

O’Neill, O’Casey’s personal and political experiences ensured that
and refused food, succor, and aid to the families of striking workers. … O’Casey thought the Easter Rising was the wrong conflict and that it divided the working class at a time when it should have been united in fighting the class war.”

In this light, as Phil Kingston of the Abbey Theatre notes, “The Plough and the Stars is not a museum piece that romanticizes the feisty spirit of the tenements and celebrates the Rising. Rather, it is a passionately critical work that is sympathetic to those who lived in the shadows of history, but scathing about the myth-making that led people to die for a cause O’Casey believed wasn’t in their best interests. In a way, The Plough and the Stars isn’t really about 1916 at all but about the world it gave rise to in 1925, the year it was written. It is about how that world isn’t the one it could have been. This play is a classic because that sense of frustration, and possibility, is still alive today.”

Texts excerpted from the Abbey Theatre’s program and resource packs for The Plough and the Stars, written and compiled by students of Tallaght Community School, Phil Kingston, and Mirjana Rendulic.
“Contemporary music meets cutting-edge theater.”
— The Guardian (UK) on Cathie Boyd

“Vibrant ... superb”
— The New Yorker on Third Coast Percussion

World Premiere
Third Coast Percussion
Cathie Boyd | Cryptic (UK)

“See You Later”

Works Composed by
Gavin Bryars, Peter Garland,
and David T. Little

November 17 – November 20
What if you could see music? In this powerhouse collaboration, Cathie Boyd and her Glasgow-based arts organization, Cryptic, join forces with Third Coast Percussion for an evening of music “presented visually.” Their staging of Peter Garland’s tender, delicate *Apple Blossom* gives way to David T. Little’s powerful *Haunt of Last Nightfall*. Described as a “ghost play” inspired by the 1981 massacre in El Salvador, “the music moves from rusticity through violence, despair, and outrage in this eloquent account by Chicago’s versatile, resourceful Third Coast Percussion,” according to Steve Smith in the *New York Times*. The world premiere of Gavin Bryars’s *The Other Side of the River*, commissioned by Peak Performances and the University of Notre Dame especially for Third Coast Percussion, provides a perfect conclusion to this immersive experience in which music, lighting, films, and staging come together to ravish the senses.

**World Premiere**

**THIRD COAST PERCUSSION**  
**CATHIE BOYD | CRYPTIC (UK)**  
**“SEE YOU LATER”**

**WORKS COMPOSED BY**  
Gavin Bryars, Peter Garland,  
AND David T. Little

**APPLE BLOSSOM**  
Peter Garland  

**HAUNT OF LAST NIGHTFALL**  
David T. Little

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER**  
(World Premiere)  
Gavin Bryars

**PERFORMED BY**  
Third Coast Percussion  
David Skidmore, Robert Dillon, Peter Martin, Sean Connors

**CONCEPT/DIRECTION** Cathie Boyd  
**CRYPTIC**  
**PRODUCTION DESIGN**  
Cryptic  
**LIGHTING DESIGN** Nich Smith  
**VISUALS** Laura Colmenares Guerra

Produced by Peak Performances  
@ Montclair State University

*Haunt of Last Nightfall* was commissioned by Third Coast Percussion. *The Other Side of the River* was commissioned by Peak Performances @ Montclair State University and the University of Notre Dame’s DeBartolo Performing Arts Center for Third Coast Percussion.

**DATES**  
November 17 & 18 @ 7:30 p.m.  
November 19 @ 8:00 p.m.  
November 20 @ 3:00 p.m.

**RUNNING TIME**  
65 minutes, no intermission

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**Engage!**

**Sneak Peek**

Thursday, November 17 @ 6:00 p.m.

Join Cathie Boyd for a behind-the-scenes peek into “See You Later.” Refreshments will be served. Free and open to the public.
Cathie Boyd, artistic director of the Glasgow-based arts organization Cryptic, calls Peak Performances' executive director Jedediah Wheeler “a brilliant matchmaker.” Wheeler brought Boyd and her team at Cryptic together with the widely praised Chicago-based ensemble Third Coast Percussion (TCP) to create a “staged concert” with composer David T. Little's *Haunt of Last Nightfall* at its center.

According to Wheeler, “Third Coast had commissioned David T. Little's *Haunt of Last Nightfall* and proposed performing it here. I suggested they work with Cathie Boyd, who is bent on reimagining live music performance.” Third Coast's original idea blossomed into a complete evening of percussion music “presented visually,” Boyd's specialty.
**Peak Performances:** The team for this project is far-flung. How do you work together long-distance?

**David Skidmore:** Skype! [Laughter]

**Cathie Boyd:** Peak Performances enabled me to spend time in Chicago working with TCP, and that was so important.

**DS:** Actually, we are in residence at the Alexander Kasser Theater rehearsing right now.

**CB:** The Cryptic team is joining next week. We have been watching TCP’s rehearsals via Skype every day.

**PP:** This may be a first, focusing lighting instruments via Skype.

**DS:** We can even hear the lighting designer [Nich Smith, based in Glasgow] over the “God” mic in the theater!

**PP:** What inspired TCP’s commission of *Haunt of Last Nightfall*?

**DS:** We were big fans of David T. Little’s music, and we knew he liked to deal with current events, social responsibility, things we were interested in exploring too. He had read Mark Danner’s *The Truth about El Mozote* about events in a small town in El Salvador during that country’s civil war in the 1980s. David was struck by its tragedy and wondered why he had never heard about it. It haunted him; he couldn’t get it out of his mind. That’s what he was capturing when he was writing *Haunt*.

**CB:** It’s a wonderful, tragic, beautiful piece. What you can’t get when you listen to the recording is the physicality of the players. When I saw it live in Chicago, I realized there’s an incredible amount of energy that comes off the stage.

>“We were big fans of David T. Little’s music, and we knew he liked to deal with current events, social responsibility, things we were interested in exploring too.”

**PP:** How were the other works and composers selected for the program?

**CB:** Peter Garland’s *Apple Blossom* was part of TCP’s existing repertoire and already in their comfort zone. That was good because I knew with *Haunt* I was going to push them considerably. We were also looking at other composers who would complement David T. Little.
CB: I asked, “If you could commission anyone to write for you, who would it be?”

DS: Cathie mentioned Gavin Bryars. That seemed like a pie-in-the-sky, dream idea to us. Gavin is a legendary composer; we’ve always wanted to work with him and never thought that would be possible. But Cathie has worked with him and knows him well.

CB: He seemed the obvious choice. He’s an extraordinary composer who can write in so many styles and does so brilliantly for percussionists.

“Cathie mentioned Gavin Bryars. That seemed like a pie-in-the-sky, dream idea to us.”

DS: So we reached out, and luckily Gavin was available and interested. Peak Performances and University of Notre Dame’s DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, where we are ensemble-in-residence, commissioned the piece for us.

PP: What is a “staged concert”?

CB: My passion is visualizing music, enhancing the concert experience through visuals. For “See You Later,” each piece is approached differently. For Apple Blossom, we will do a little bit of lighting and a little bit of video; very small and subtle to begin. Then Haunt will have a lot of lighting effects. The music and titles are so strong that I didn’t want to add dance or film to it, and TCP will memorize the entire second half of the score, so I am free to work with them more physically. For Gavin’s piece, The Other Side of the River, video designer Laura Colmenares Guerra has made a beautiful film.

PP: How does Apple Blossom set the stage for Haunt of Last Nightfall?

DS: Apple Blossom is a very beautiful, simple piece. It’s

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El Mozote Massacre in the News

David T. Little’s Haunt of Last Nightfall was inspired by the 1981 El Mozote Massacre in El Salvador.

Massacre of Hundreds Reported in Salvador Village

The [surviving] villagers have compiled a list of the names, ages, and villages of 733 peasants, mostly children, women and old people, who they say were murdered by the Government soldiers. The Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, which works with the Roman Catholic Church, puts the number at 926.

—RAYMOND BONNER, Special to The New York Times | Jan. 27, 1982

Testimony Given to the Senate Foreign Affairs Subcommittee

There is no evidence to confirm that [Salvadoran] Government forces systematically massacred civilians ... or that the number of civilians killed even remotely approached the 733 or 926 victims cited in the press.

—THOMAS ENDERS, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs | January 28, 1982

Abroad at Home; The Whole Truth

Over the years politicians and journalists have differed bitterly about what happened [in Mozote]—who did the killing, indeed whether there was a massacre at all. The argument is over now. After the Danner report (The Truth of El Mozote by Mark Danner, published in The New Yorker, December 6, 1993), no rational person can doubt that Salvadoran Government forces carried out a massacre. They killed hundreds of people in El Mozote and other hamlets nearby: men, women, children, infants. They killed with a savagery that is hard even to read about.


www.peakperfs.org
Seeing *Haunt of Last Nightfall* staged for the first time was overwhelming. To return to this piece after time away is to allow for healed wounds to be reopened. Even six years after writing it, I find listening to it to be a very moving, intense, and ultimately upsetting experience. The staging, lighting, and sound design amplified its tragedy even further.  

—David T. Little, composer, *Haunt of Last Nightfall*

basically one chord progression played tremolo on marimbas with soft mallets, and it makes this humming sound, almost like an organ.

CB: It’s very calming, and because it is so delicate, it tunes our ears to listening. The stillness with which TCP plays *Apple Blossom* is extraordinary; they hardly move.

DS: The piece sets the intention for the evening, inviting everyone to lean in and listen a little bit closer to David T. Little’s work and the story his piece brings to light.

PP: How would you describe *The Other Side of the River*?

DS: It’s an incredibly ambitious, expressive piece that focuses on two marimbas but also has these bell toll sounds. I hear it as almost an elegy, which of course makes a lot of programmatic sense. It’s beautiful. I can’t imagine a better piece to go with *Haunt of Last Nightfall*.

PP: What inspired the title for the program, “See You Later”?

CB: Laura Colmenares Guerra introduced me to the work of Eduardo Galeano, a prominent Uruguayan writer who chronicled centuries of economic exploitation in Latin America. He said, “History never really says goodbye. History says, see you later.”

PP: David, a “staged concert” must be a new experience for TCP. What is that like?

DS: Cathie's work is not about tagging something onto a musical performance, but really reshaping the whole evening and reimagining the impact of these musical works within a broader, multidisciplinary event. Creating this new, larger artistic experience is a thrill.

CB: It was genius of Jed to bring us together. TCP is a brave ensemble. They take risks. Not all musicians are willing to do this, to let someone push them. I have to thank them for that. Their musicianship is extraordinary, and it’s a joy to work with them.
“First-rate choreography. The dancers are so good because the choreography shows them at full tilt.”

World Premiere

Richard Alston Dance Company

with the Shanghai Quartet
and Jason Ridgway, piano

February 2 – February 5
Richard Alston, considered one of the most musical choreographers working today, makes a dazzling return to Peak Performances with new dances set to glorious music from four centuries. His An Italian in Madrid, dubbed “a multifaceted choreographic jewel” at its London premiere, features a romantic story set to Scarlatti’s sonatas. In Mazur Alston explores the “melodic beauty and exquisite ache” of Chopin’s mazurkas. RADC associate choreographer Martin Lawrance makes his New York–area choreographic debut with Stronghold, set to Julia Wolfe’s driving piece for eight double basses. The pièce de résistance is Chacony, a brand new Alston work set to the music of Purcell and Britten. According to Alston, “Purcell’s marvellously vigorous Chacony is rich and warm, ceremoniously swaying through its complex variations. Britten’s own Chacony, a loving tribute to Purcell, treads a darker ground, full of shadows and anguish, but through the darkness there emerges triumphant resolution—bold repeated chords in the major key asserting the resilience of the humanity.”

—The Guardian (UK)
The beguiling novelty is *An Italian in Madrid*. In the 1720s, Domenico Scarlatti was court musician to the Portuguese Princess Maria Barbara, who was to marry the Spanish Prince Ferdinand of Asturias and—sublime luggage—take her harpsichordist with her to Spain. Alston employs a selection of the hundreds of sonatas written for the princess by Scarlatti, vividly realized here by pianist Jason Ridgway, exploring them to contemplate this incident and also play the most artful of creative cards.

For Maria Barbara he has recruited Vidya Patel, an exquisite young Kathak dancer from Birmingham, whose grace, beauty, and vivid technique colour the choreography. Costuming and the dizzying turns and delicious shapes of their dance pay tribute to the Kathak style, yet amid the fiorituri of the action the narrative of betrothal is touchingly shown. And how well it all sits on its score, and how cleverly the dance suggests ritual and the breath of emotion.

— The Financial Times (UK)

Chopin’s piano compositions seem to rise from a lake of silence, and once played, to sink back into that silence. It’s as if they’ve been summoned from the past, which is perhaps why they touch us with such a precise edge. In Richard Alston’s *Mazur*, set to seven mazurkas, Liam Riddick demonstrates an affinity for Chopin’s music which absolutely embraces its silences, echoing them in a vibrant and profound stillness. To be still, Riddick shows us, is not to stop dancing. The piece, created in 2015, is a duet for Riddick and Nicholas Bodych, also a strong presence. There are flurries of movement, softly sprung cabrioles, unforced lifts and linkings of arms.

— The Observer (UK)
I tracked down Martin Lawrance, associate choreographer for the Richard Alston Dance Company (RADC), in Manila. He had been commissioned by Ballet Manila to create Rebel, an update of Spartacus, with that lush Khachaturian score. Despite his impressive résumé and years spent onstage, the charming and cheeky Lawrance has the bouncy enthusiasm of a bright-eyed teenager. He had just painted the wall behind him blue so with his white shirt and bright smile he could really “pop” on the little screen for our talk.

Like Alston, Lawrance likes to be thoroughly saturated in the music he’s working with by the time he gets into the studio. “I try not to touch a piece of music until I’ve listened to it for two to three months on my iPhone.” His tastes run from classical composers like Liszt (Burning) and Shostakovich (Captured) to contemporary composers like John Adams, Scott Walker, and especially Julia Wolfe.

"As a dancer, Martin Lawrance inspired me for the first 12 years of my company. Now he choreographs, and his voice is clearly his own and getting stronger and stronger. We are proud to present his work for the first time at Peak Performances—his work is an important part of the Company profile, and whilst his language is different from mine, we definitely sing from the same hymn-sheet.” —Richard Alston
Who has influenced Lawrance’s music choices? “Richard Alston. His music taste is so vast.” When RADC is on the road, he and Alston visit music shops together and check out random CDs based on their interesting covers. “Richard will hold one up and say, ‘Listen to this,’” and the research begins.

*Stronghold*, a composition for eight double basses, is Lawrance’s fourth collaboration with Julia Wolfe’s unique sound. According to Wolfe, “With eight double basses going at once, the ensemble turns into one mega bass, and it’s hard to tell where one player ends and another begins.” Lawrance says he loves Wolfe’s drive. “Everything’s so rhythmical. It makes me want to dance. She’s a composer for choreography.”

*Stronghold* was inspired by the twisty, turning, defensive mazes Lawrance encountered on the Greek Islands, created centuries ago to keep invaders at bay. Ten magnificent dancers, five men and five women, inhabit the bare stage. As the double basses begin their assault, the dancers break into random but determined combinations that aren't just defensive positions; this onstage community is nurturing, encouraging, and supporting each other steadfastly through the stirring onslaught of the double basses.

One of the subtexts of the piece is the respect and affection Lawrance has for the RADC dancers. They have all known each other for several years. “Like Richard, I never make movement outside of the studio. I know the music and I know what’s in my heart. I like to see where the dancers take it,” he says. Then, using his graceful RADC-trained hands for emphasis, he explains, “I may say to a dancer I want you to do this, and he may take it there and I think, well, that’s interesting. Let’s carry on with that.”

Manuel Igrejas is a playwright, poet, publicist, proud resident of Montclair, and all-purpose art guy.

Praise For *Stronghold*

“Martin Lawrance’s recent *Stronghold* [is] a big company work, intense, magnetic, intricately organized in its powerful rushes and pulses, and set to the contemporary composer Julia Wolfe’s titular score for eight double basses, driving, deep-delving in tone, raw and savage.” —The Guardian (UK)

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**MARTIN LAWRANCE**

**Martin Lawrance** was born in Leicester and began dancing with Leicester Youth Dance Theatre. He trained at Coventry Centre for the Performing Arts and London Contemporary Dance School. He danced with Richard Alston Dance Company from 1995 to 2007, having over 25 works created on him, and became rehearsal director in 2007. As a choreographer, Lawrance has created works for Ballet Manila, Scottish Ballet, Ballet Black, London Contemporary Dance School, and the State School of Dance in Athens. *Stronghold* is the tenth work he has created for Richard Alston Dance Company.

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**JULIA WOLFE**

**Julia Wolfe**, winner of the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in music, draws inspiration from folk, classical, and rock genres, bringing a modern sensibility to each while simultaneously tearing down the walls between them. Wolfe’s music is distinguished by an intense physicality and a relentless power that pushes performers to extremes and demands attention from the audience.  

*Martin Lawrance* photo by Hugo Glendinning; *Julia Wolfe* photo by Peter Salimg.
Amy Beth Kirsten’s work is “dark, wild, and engrossing … wondrously eclectic … [and] combines spiky modernism, breezy pop, hints of Indian music, percussion wildness and more.” —Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times

World Premiere

Amy Beth Kirsten
Mark DeChiazza

HOWL

QUIXOTÉ

March 23 – March 26
“Wildly inventive ... steeped in myth but utterly modern ... a tour de force.”
—The Washington Post on Amy Beth Kirsten and Mark DeChiazza

Commissioned by Peak Performances as part of its new extended residency program, PeRL: Performing Arts Research Laboratory, QUIXOTE is a bold re-imagining of the Cervantes classic. With new music by Amy Beth Kirsten and direction by Mark DeChiazza, the team that created Colombine’s Paradise Theatre, QUIXOTE lets us experience the mad knight’s hallucinations first hand. A soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, and four singing percussionists provide the voices inside the old man’s head. This simple and gorgeous production is equal parts storefront theater and expressionist opera.
Peak Performances recently launched PeARL (Performing Arts Research Laboratory), an extended residency program for performing artists, to enable and support a deep creative process culminating in the world premiere of a new work during the Peak Performances season.

In July, the first PeARL residents, Amy Beth Kirsten and Mark DeChiazza, brought the members of their company, HOWL, together in the rehearsal studio at the Alexander Kasser Theater for a week of work on their new piece, QUIXOTE. They rehearsed, tested new ideas, and collaborated with designers to imagine the final look and sound of the new production, which will premiere on the Kasser’s stage in March 2017.

“Making QUIXOTE would be impossible without this support,” said Amy Beth Kirsten. “During our PeARL residency we are developing the staging and music, and we have the added benefit of presenting the work-in-progress to students and engaging with the campus at large. We feel incredibly fortunate and can’t wait to share our invention.”

According to Jedediah Wheeler, Peak Performances’ executive director, “PeARL expands on the residencies Peak has offered since its inception in 2004. It allows artists to work from the most basic inspiration to the final performance, knowing that a single institution is supporting the evolution of an idea over two years. Along the way they have to experiment, try out ideas. With PeARL we say, ‘We know your idea isn’t finished, but we like it, we think your notion is good, and we believe in you. You can work on it here, adapting and changing and knowing where you’re going to work at least; making the piece here in both our rehearsal studio and on stage.’ It diminishes somewhat the anxiety that the creative process in America stimulates.”

In Development:

QUIXOTE

AMY BETH KIRSTEN’S

music combines popular idioms with fierce expressionism and theater and is distinguished by an intense physicality that pushes players to extremes by making their bodies and voices instruments of artistic expression. A composer, librettist, and vocalist, she is the recipient of fellowships and awards from the John S. Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and ASCAP. Her works have been commissioned and supported by the New World Symphony, Harvard University Fromm Foundation, Chamber Music America, The MAP Fund, New Music USA, and the National Endowment for the Arts.
**Mark DeChiazza** is a director, filmmaker, designer, and choreographer. Many of his projects explore interactions between music performance and media to discover new expressive possibilities. His work can bring together composers, ensemble, and musicians with visual artists, dancers, music ensembles, and makers of all types. Recent projects include *Orpheus Unsung*, a collaboration with composer Steven Mackey that premiered at the Guthrie Theater in June 2016; *My Lai*, an opera monodrama by Jonathan Berger featuring the Kronos Quartet, Văn-Ánh Võ, and Rinde Eckert; the film *Hiraeth*, which partners with performance of Sarah Kirkland Snider’s 35-minute orchestral work of the same name, commissioned by North Carolina Symphony and Princeton Symphony Orchestra; and John Luther Adams’s *Sila*, a massive site-determined piece for 80 musicians commissioned by Lincoln Center.

**Howl** Equal parts storefront theater, opera company, and grotesque chamber ensemble, HOWL was founded in 2012 by long-time collaborators Amy Beth Kirsten, Lindsay Kesselman, Mark DeChiazza, and Ian Rosenbaum to explore the edges of music and theater. A modular ensemble, HOWL’s roster includes some of today’s most sought-after young musicians, many of whom are multi-instrumentalists who sing and singers who play instruments. HOWL’s mission is to transform the concert experience into a theatrical one by boldly animating all elements of performance and all resources of the stage.

Choreographer Denisa Musilova and director Mark DeChiazza discuss staging.

Performer Kirsten Sollek, Terry Sweeney, and Hai-Ting Chinn in rehearsal

Performer Jonny Allen bandages Don Quixote (Terry Sweeney)’s wounds.

Percussionists experiment with new sounds.

All photos by Gennadi Novash

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All Terrain String Festival: BOLCOM 4x4

Arditti Quartet | Chiara String Quartet
Harlem Quartet | Shanghai Quartet

With Eliot Fisk and John Patitucci

March 31 – April 2
National Medal of Arts, Pulitzer Prize, and Grammy Award winner William Bolcom is an American composer of chamber, operatic, vocal, choral, cabaret, ragtime, and symphonic music. He was a member of the faculty of the University of Michigan’s School of Music from 1973 until his retirement in 2008. His setting of William Blake’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience won four Grammy Awards in 2006. As a pianist Bolcom has performed and recorded his own work, frequently in collaboration with his wife and musical partner, mezzo-soprano Joan Morris. Their 25th album, Autumn Leaves, was released recently on White Pine Records.

His jam-packed festival celebrates the richness of string quartet composition and performance, featuring four of the world’s most diverse and celebrated quartets performing works by classic and modern composers. What binds this audacious, ambitious program together? The work of Pulitzer Prize–winning American composer William Bolcom and the stellar playing of the Shanghai Quartet are featured at every performance.

The Harlem Quartet opens the festival with an evening of classic and jazzier quartet fare, performing works by Mozart, Dizzy Gillespie, Rafael Hernández Marín, Abelardo Valdés, William Bolcom, and Osvaldo Golijov. The brilliant young Chiara String Quartet, known for playing without sheet music, performs works by Jefferson Friedman, Gabriela Lena Frank, and Bolcom. In a rare US appearance, the famed Arditti Quartet performs Bolcom’s String Quartet no. 8, Elliott Carter’s String Quartet no. 5, and with Eliot Fisk on guitar, the NY/NJ premiere of Wolfgang Rihm’s Guitar Quintet. The festival concludes with the Shanghai Quartet performing the world premiere of William Bolcom’s String Quartet no. 12, commissioned by Peak Performances.
“I think the idea is now for blacks to write about the history of our music. It’s time for that, because whites have been doing it all the time. It’s time for us to do it ourselves and tell it like it is.”

—Dizzy Gillespie

Award-winning composer Gabriela Lena Frank is known for ardently exploring her multicultural identity (her mother is of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry; her father is of Lithuanian/Jewish descent) through her music. She credits her mentor, William Bolcom, with urging her to travel to South America and incorporate its music into her compositions.
String Quartet no. 8
William Bolcom

Guitar Quintet
Wolfgang Rihm
with Eliot Fisk, guitar

String Quartet no. 5
Elliott Carter

Anea Crystal
Chaya Czernowin
with the Shanghai Quartet

Poems from Tang
Zhou Long

String Quartet no. 12 (World Premiere)
William Bolcom

String Quartet no. 14
Antonín Dvořák

Wolfgang Rihm is “someone whose unstoppable musical creativity, whose tumult of pieces for orchestras, opera houses, string quartets, for the familiar forms of musical institutions, and for famous soloists such as Anne-Sophie Mutter, makes him one of the most approachable, engaging and profound composers writing music today.” —The Guardian (UK)

“... The idea is not to give the audience as much understanding as possible. ... I would like a person who hears my music to experience something. And I hope that the experience would be visceral and very, very strong.” —Chaya Czernowin

www.peakperfs.org
To celebrate William Bolcom’s seemingly endless sonic curiosity, there could hardly be a more fittingly named vehicle than the All Terrain String Festival: Bolcom 4 x 4. In this series of four programs featuring music for string quartet, each concert will highlight one distinctive work by the composer, a modern master with a virtually unparalleled ability to encompass a vast variety of musical traditions with unflagging expertise and originality.

Fitting itself to Bolcom’s ability to veer off the road of classical tradition while upholding his elastic yet exacting technique, the festival will feature ensembles that follow suit: the Harlem Quartet, the Chiara String Quartet, the Arditti Quartet, and the Shanghai Quartet.

“The quartet world is a lot more diverse than people really understand,” says Peak Performances founder and executive producer Jedediah Wheeler. “Each group has a specialty it can offer,” says Nicholas Tzavaras, cellist of the Shanghai Quartet, which has been in residence with Peak Performances and Montclair State University for 10 years. “It makes this a really unique festival of string quartets for our audiences,” he adds. “Everything is done with the audience in mind, to open up their musical palettes to things they are not familiar with, whether it’s playing by memory or improvised jazz tunes or cutting-edge contemporary music.”

Bolcom’s music is part of what will be new to most audiences; the festival coincides with the recent publication of six of his early string quartets by Edward B. Marks Music Company and includes the world premiere of his twelfth. While his string quartets are not his best-known works, they form a musical autobiography, spanning Bolcom’s career from age 11 to 78.

“I tend to want to ask performers to do what I know I can’t do,” Bolcom says. “If I had my druthers, I would be a string quartet. I’d be an 8-armed, 4-playered entity.”

Bolcom traces his love of quartets back to the Juilliard Quartet’s visit to his hometown of Seattle in 1949 when he was 11 years old, “probably the first time [Alban] Berg’s Lyric Suite was played west of the Mississippi.” Bartók and Hindemith were early influences, and he went on to study with 20th-century luminaries including Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messiaen.

Yet relatively early in his career, Bolcom began to stray from the stark, non-tonal traditions of the day. In 1970, he published the first of a collection of ragtime-style pieces. “It was a way to liberate myself from the kind of chromatic style we were expected to write if we were writing up-to-the-minute music,” he says.

At the festival, the Harlem Quartet will play a selection of Bolcom’s rags, arranged for string quartet, alongside Latin and jazz standards and a Mozart work. The quartet is devoted to such diverse programs in order to engage new audiences, and its 2013 collaboration with Chick Corea won a Grammy Award.

The liberating effect ragtime had for Bolcom may be similar for the Harlem Quartet musicians—and for listeners. Of its non-classical programming, Ilmar Gavilán of the Harlem Quartet says, “It’s very therapeutic, because we let loose, and often we apply the
same mentality to the classical repertoire, respecting the score but being spontaneous and free on the stage."

Showcasing another side of Bolcom’s body of work—which includes the Pulitzer Prize–winning 12 New Etudes for Piano (1988) that recall the composer’s training with Messiaen—will be the Arditti Quartet. Known as a standard-bearer of contemporary repertoire, the Arditti will play Bolcom’s String Quartet no. 8 on a program that also includes works by Elliott Carter and Wolfgang Rihm.

The Shanghai Quartet will appear on all festival programs, serving as guest artists with the three other quartets.

"Each quartet has its own vision that I want to honor and celebrate," Wheeler says. "It’s about all the different places they can go, how broad music can be."

The Shanghai will play Bolcom’s Octet: Double Quartet (2007), a work originally written for the prestigious Guarneri and Johannes String Quartets, alongside the Chiara String Quartet. The Chiara, recently in residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, made its mark mastering the challenging feat of playing music by heart and championing living composers.

"We live in a vacuum," Shanghai’s Tzavaras admits. "String quartets are always playing with the four members of the group. It’s nice to have some outside input; you get an injection of new ideas." Hyeyung Julie Yoon of the Chiara adds, "A really animated conversation is a good way to describe an octet performance—you feed each other as you respond to a melody."

While duo quartet collaborations are relatively unusual, one of the touchstones of the string repertoire is Mendelssohn’s String Octet, op. 20, which was an inspiration for Bolcom.

“There is a touch of the Mendelssohn Octet that is referenced ... but very dysfunctional,” Bolcom says of his Octet: Double Quartet.

Also on the Chiara’s program will be a driving, rock-tinged work by Jefferson Friedman and Leyendas, a work by Bolcom student Gabriela Lena Frank that draws on folk tunes she discovered in an Andean Mountain village.

Bolcom recognizes the stylistic freedom of composers today, including those under his tutelage at the University of Michigan, and he sees a contrast to the technical strictures expected when he began his own career.

Bolcom’s great achievement in musical catholicity remains his Songs of Innocence and of Experience, in which William Blake’s poetry inspires an empathetic, expressive, and ear-opening collision: orderly classicism, jarring dissonances, country rock, bombastic British theater style, and moments that evoke hymn, tribal chanting, and old-time fiddling. A sprawling, 25-years-in-the-making work for orchestra, choir, and five to ten soloists, the piece won four 2006 Grammy Awards for a recording made at the University of Michigan.

Bolcom’s latest work, his String Quartet no. 12, which falls to the Shanghai Quartet for its premiere, seems to be rooted in a similar communicative impulse, drawing on a variety of resources and textures in order to convey a series of moods and experiences. "I’m figuring this is my last quartet," Bolcom says. "I like the idea of a cycle of 12."

Written in short movements like brief episodes of dreams and wakefulness, the work includes a “Fantasia Notturna”—"my nocturnal version of Beethoven’s op. 131"; a slow movement, “Rude Awakening,” which marks getting up in the middle of the night; a fast, skittering “Hallucination” that builds to a brutal climax; “Timor Mortis,” fear of death; “Amor Vincit,” a more placid interlude “very frankly in D major”; and “as if from far away,” which the composer describes as “very simple” and “almost like old music.”

“It’s dangerous to say, but Bill Bolcom really wants people to listen to what he’s written. It’s a listenable, communicable musical style,” says Wheeler. “I think of him as someone with open arms, bringing as many people as he can possibly gather. By bringing in the diversity of styles of American music, he creates his own vernacular.”

With the variety of styles and tones, the exploration of the historical and the contemporary, and the recognition of living master artists with a high level of craftsmanship and distinctive voices, the festival honors both Bolcom’s work and Peak Performances’ mission.

“Each quartet has its own vision that I want to honor and celebrate,” Wheeler says. “It’s about all the different places they can go, how broad music can be.”

Ronni Reich’s writing has appeared in the Washington Post, Back Stage, and I Care If You Listen. She was a staff writer and classical music critic for the Star-Ledger from 2009 to 2015.
“Doug Elkins is one of the most witty, musical and inventive choreographers of his generation.”
—The New York Times

World Premiere

doug elkins
choreography, etc.

April 20 – April 23

www.peakperfs.org
Brilliant ... skillful craftsmanship, musicality and timing; the effortless melding of every kind of dance technique you can think of, mediated by [Elkins’s] own inimitable, highly coordinated physical style.”

—Roslyn Sulcas, The New York Times

Since his days as a break dancing B-Boy, Doug Elkins has not only turned himself on his head but the dance world as well. His irreverent and provocative work often deconstructs classics (The Sound of Music inspired Fräulein Maria; Othello and José Limón’s The Moor’s Pavane inspired Mo(or)town/Redux). He is putting the finishing touches on a brand new work for Peak Performances and is at work on a new film for Dance for Film on Location at Montclair State University.
Doug Elkins is a two-time New York Dance and Performance (Bessie) Award-winning choreographer and 2012 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Creative Arts Fellow. He also self-identifies as a man with “a promiscuous attention span.” These are a few of his favorite things.

**The Sound of Music**

My first memory of going to the movies is going to see *The Sound of Music*. I was four or five. It was fascinating, seeing something on a very large screen where people would just break out into song. I know this is a real cognitive leap, but you can read *The Sound of Music* as being about the nature of art. Maria is a trickster character. She doesn’t fit into the structure of the abbey and, ironically, she is sent to an even more rigid place. She walks into a wounded family that is missing a matriarch, with a father who tries to run it like a ship. How does she help heal this family? By teaching them how to put on little shows.
Parenthood

When he was little, one of my son’s favorite things was to watch _The Sound of Music_. We would make these little milk carton macaroni puppets to perform along with the DVD. I realized my son was watching the same way I was when I first went to see _The Sound of Music_. I made _Fräulein Maria_, in a certain way, to have a discussion with my then four- and five-year-old children, Liam and Gigi. Several of us in the early Joe’s Pub performances were new parents with young children, and the original dedication for the show said “Fräulein Maria is humbly dedicated to...” and it had the names of our children, “just in case you want to know what it is that Mommy and Daddy do.”

Making New Work

I love making things. If you give me the structure of making something, I’ll do it, whether it’s a dance or a tasty omelet.

I love making things with a bunch of people. Do you know the children’s story “Stone Soup”? Making a new piece is like that; it’s like the meals you make with friends. I like the whole process of making dance, theater, film. Everyone contributes. I like that synthesis, that collision of the marketplace of ideas and the bickering and the stuff that goes into making something.

His Playlist

My playlist includes everything from top 40 to old ’70s soul to Buxtehude.

I like Kendrick Lamar and Jally Kebba Susso, an African griot and master kora player. I like Fleetwood Mac and ukulele covers of the _Adventure Time_ songs. I listen to everything from David Byrne to Bach, from the polyphonies of Carlo Gesualdo to the old Nelson Riddle orchestrations of Sinatra music that remind me of my grandfather.

I was inspired to start dancing by lots of things. Growing up watching kung fu films like _The Five Deadly Venoms_, all the stuff you hear Wu-Tang Clan mentioning. I love _wuxia_, which is kung fu film choreography, by masters like Jackie Chan, Donnie Yen, Stephen Chow, and Yuen Wu Ping. I grew up loving _Soul Train_. I learned to do The Robot. Early funk style. I also loved line from _Soul Train_, Cholly Atkins [the dancer/choreographer who created the trademark moves of many major Motown acts], and my own love of hip hop. The piece is me marching through histories and asking questions about dealing with loss, of love gained and love lost.

Kung Fu, _Soul Train_, Buster Keaton, and _The House of Ninja_

I love making things. If you give me the structure of making something, I’ll do it, whether it’s a dance or a tasty omelet.”
The artists I am fortunate enough to work with are brilliant and tirelessly inquisitive.

Mo(or)town/Redux
Photo: © Jamie Kraus, courtesy of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival
“All dance forms always borrow, beg, and steal. I don’t really worry about this imagined ‘pure land.’ I enjoy the mess.”

His Collaborators

The artists I am fortunate enough to work with are brilliant and tirelessly inquisitive. They are willing to help me figure out stuff. I don’t make work in a vacuum. I’m lucky to have a team that I get to work with. The dancers are generous with who they are and deeply curious. They have a high tolerance for uncertainty and are willing to go gleaning and dumpster diving to make art. I am so grateful for that fellowship.

Humor

Somebody once said to me, “Your work tends to be very funny; are you ever serious?” And I said, “Oh, I’m serious all the time. I just don’t think it precludes a sense of humor.” A joke is a kind of delivery system. It sets up an expectation and then mildly twists it or points out its absurdity to offer a change of perspective. One of my favorite descriptions of being a choreographer is by the brilliant Trisha Brown, who said, “I’m a bricklayer with a sense of humor.” Like a joke, it’s a statement that misdirects you. You laugh, but what is she really talking about when you undress that statement? It speaks to someone who has an appreciation for craft and structure, but with that tag at the end, with a sense of humor. A sense of humor is ultimately something very human.
“Astrid Hadad’s cabaret of colors will stop you in your tracks.”
—The Miami Herald

American Premiere

Astrid Hadad

Tierra Misteriosa

May 5 – May 6

www.peakperfs.org
This jam-packed festival celebrates the richness of string quartet composition and performance, featuring four of the world’s most diverse and celebrated quartets performing works by classic and modern composers. What binds this audacious, ambitious program together? The work of Pulitzer Prize–winning American composer William Bolcom and the stellar playing of the Shanghai Quartet are featured at every performance.

The Harlem Quartet opens the festival with an evening of classic and jazzier quartet fare, performing works by Mozart, Dizzy Gillespie, Rafael Hernández Marín, Abelardo Valdés, William Bolcom, and Osvaldo Golijov. The brilliant young Chiara String Quartet, known for playing without sheet music, performs works by Jefferson Friedman, Gabriela Lena Frank, and Bolcom. In a rare US appearance, the famed Arditti Quartet performs Bolcom’s String Quartet no. 8, Elliott Carter’s String Quartet no. 5, and with Eliot Fisk on guitar, the NY/NJ Premiere of Wolfgang Rihm’s Guitar Quintet. The festival concludes with the Shanghai Quartet performing the world premiere of William Bolcom’s String Quartet no. 12, commissioned by Peak Performances.

American Premiere
ASTRID HADAD
TIERRA MISTERIOSA

LIMITED DATES
May 5 @ 7:30 p.m.
May 6 @ 8:00 p.m.

Program Consultant:
Isabel Soffer/Live Sounds

“My style is syncretic, aesthetic, pathetic, and diuretic, which demonstrates, without shame, the attitudes of machismo, masochism, nihilism, and ‘I-could-give-a-damn’ inherent in all cultures.”

—Astrid Hadad

Celebrate Cinco de Mayo with Mexican cabaret artist Astrid Hadad’s Tierra Misteriosa, a sassy and tuneful jaunt through Mexico’s tumultuous history. Carried by slaves, Hadad takes us from the ancient Mexico of Tenochtitlan, through the forgotten women of history like La Malinche, the beautiful woman who acted as Cortes’s interpreter and later bore his children, to the Mexican heroine of the future. Tierra Misteriosa is part telenovela, part vaudeville and concert. Hadad shimmies in gorgeous, over-the-top costumes and soulfully sings us through the historical contradictions of her beloved homeland. We’ll hear some of the great Mexican banda classics and some of Hadad’s own pungent music. The colors are rich, the music is hot, and the drama is real, but it is Hadad’s insightful and irreverent commentaries that really provide the oxygen.

Photo: Fernando Trejo
Astrid Hadad
An Aztec Priestess in the 21st Century

BY MANUEL IGREJAS

 Astrid Hadad is a wise, sassy, and petite powerhouse who illuminated my computer’s small screen with her megawatt wit and personality during our brief Skype conversation. Michèle Desfrenne, Hadad’s French partner, was nearby to fill in any gaps in her forceful English. It was like watching the coming attractions of a spicy Latina blockbuster set in their art-filled Mexico City aerie.

Born in Mexico of Lebanese parents, Hadad grew up in Quintana Roo on the Yucatan Peninsula. The only Lebanese thing she retained was the food. Her first-generation background allowed her to see Mexico from a slightly different angle, past the built-in prejudice against native people. “My Lebanese roots made me love Mexico even more,” she says in her strong, smoky voice.

With her long dark hair, penetrating brown eyes, striking profile, and earthy allure, Hadad resembles the Aztec goddesses she channels in her stage shows. Though the Yucatan is the home of the Mayan culture, most of Hadad’s work is influenced by the Aztecs because, she says, “I live in Mexico City, and the Aztecs were the imperialists of their time.”
Besides the Mexican music she heard all around her, Hadad’s girlhood was influenced by the Cuban sounds coming from the radio and the glamorous divas of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, like beautiful María Félix, who thumbed her nose at Hollywood and challenged the baked-in machismo of Latin culture.

In college Hadad studied acting, but legitimate theater felt too stifling for her big personality and big ideas. She was drawn to the popular variety shows, the Teatro de Revista, with their blend of music, slapstick, and political comedy. Influenced by Kurt Weill, she went to Germany to observe its cabaret. She began by singing the great songs in the extensive Mexican songbook and writing some of her own. As her work evolved, the political element took hold, combining with Hadad’s subversive sense of play to create her campy, over-the-top performances. As an openly gay woman in Mexico, Hadad is known for putting her own spin on traditional songs to challenge gender roles. In the lovely classic tune “Soy Virgencita,” an innocent maiden laments her chaste life. Hadad flips the song on its head, wearing a costume that incorporates a billowing skirt, festooned with lilies and a watering can. Halfway through she adds a sombrero, ammunition belt, and mustache and sings the song as a macho man.

Given Hadad’s politics and staunch feminism, it’s no wonder that Tierra Misteriosa is partly a tribute to Mexico’s great forgotten women. In addition to the screen actress María Félix, there is Lucha Reyes, who broke with tradition to sing the full-throated ranchera songs usually reserved for men, and the mysterious, notorious Aztec woman La Malinche. The conquering Spaniards enlisted her to translate for them. She bore Cortes a son and later married a Spanish captain. She was treated well by the conquerors, but until recently, history dismissed her as a traitor.

“Women of that time had no opportunities,” Hadad says. “They weren’t even allowed to talk. Because La Malinche had a talent with words, she was able to improve her circumstances and survive. When history doesn’t forget women, it treats them badly.” Though remarkably resilient, Hadad has felt a modern-day version of the same stigma. “Until now I have been considered alternative, underground, outsider. Officials don’t like my work very much.” But audiences cheer. Her colorful extravagance and winking provocation should be a glorious finale to Peak Performances’ 2016–17 season.

Manuel Igrejas is a playwright, poet, publicist, proud resident of Montclair, and all-purpose art guy.
Discussions

Be curious: ask a question, get an insider’s view, learn the story behind the story at our discussion series.

Open to all, no ticket required.

Community Conversations: Audience and artists come together to share reflections and responses immediately following select Saturday evening performances.

Sneak Peeks: Good conversation is combined with good food on select Thursdays (starting at 6 p.m.), as artists, writers, and thinkers offer insight and a behind-the-scenes peek into our exciting productions.

Art & Society: This new series explores the vital role of the arts in illuminating contemporary social and political issues.

“Peak Performances helps to open windows for teaching in several disciplines. Students benefit from the thematic and conceptual connections across the humanities and sciences. What’s more, the preparation for attending a performance and related discussions assists in developing skills for critical thinking, writing, philosophical inquiry and reasoning.”

—Dr. Chris Parker, Classics and General Humanities

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—Prof. Mike Lees, Creative Thinking course instructor
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BY PHONE: 973-655-5112
IN PERSON: Monday – Friday, noon – 6 p.m.
PERFORMANCE DAYS: 10 a.m. until curtain
ONLINE TICKETING: peakperfs.org

The Fine Print

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• Subject to availability, tickets may be exchanged up to 24 hours before the performance for which they were purchased.

• Tickets may only be exchanged for a different performance of the same event.

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• Latecomers will be seated solely at the discretion of theater management.

• Children under 6 are not permitted except with express permission of theater management.
September 29 – October 2
American Premiere
Raphaëlle Boitel
The Forgotten/L’Oublié(e)

October 6 – 9
American Premiere
Cullberg Ballet
Figure a Sea
Choreography by Deborah Hay
Sound Score by Laurie Anderson

October 20 – 23
Abbey Theatre
The Plough and the Stars
By Sean O’Casey | Directed by Sean Holmes

November 17 – 20
World Premiere
Third Coast Percussion
Cathie Boyd | Cryptic
“See You Later”
Works Composed by Gavin Bryars, Peter Garland, and David T. Little

February 2 – 5
Richard Alston Dance Company
With Shanghai Quartet and Jason Ridgway
Chacony (World Premiere)
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March 23 – 26
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Amy Beth Kirsten | Mark DeChiazza | HOWL
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World Premiere
All Terrain String Festival: Bolcom 4 x 4
Featuring the Arditti, Chiara, Harlem, and Shanghai Quartets
Composers William Bolcom, Wolfgang Rihm, Elliott Carter, Antonín Dvořák, Dizzy Gillespie, and many others

April 20 – 23
World Premiere
doug elkins choreography, etc.

May 5 – May 6
American Premiere
Astrid Hadad
Tierra Misteriosa

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