

NEWSLETTER

by dance students for dance students: February 2008

San Francisco
Conservatory
of Dance

SUMNER LEE RHATIGAN, DIRECTOR

Naharin's "gaga" Language and Choreography Added to SFCD Curriculum

Always seeking to expand learning opportunities for its students, the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance has added the study of Ohad Naharin's work to that of William Forsythe and Jiri Kylian in its 2008 Summer Intensive Program. With representatives of three of the world's leading contemporary choreographers setting works on its students, the Conservatory's repertory is beginning to resemble that of such major international companies as Nederlands Dans Theatre, Compañía Nacional de Danza, Paris Opera Ballet, and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. [more...](#)



Faculty Interview: Thomas McManus

Thomas McManus, longtime colleague of William Forsythe, came to the Conservatory last summer to teach Forsythe's Improvisation technologies and set his work on the students. This summer, SFCD is thrilled to have him back again. Conservatory student Megan Kurashige caught up with Thomas to talk about his background, his time with Ballett Frankfurt, and his plans for this summer's program.

MK. Thomas, can you give us a bit of biographical information, just to introduce you to readers who haven't had the opportunity to meet you? [more...](#)

Summer Choreographic Apprentice Residency

Choreography, at its most basic, is moving bodies in space and through time. Choreographers need to have all three—bodies, space, and time—to practice their art, not to mention the more elusive material of inspiration. Securing these necessities can be difficult, especially for a young, aspiring choreographer. Dancers have schedules, studios are expensive; and getting time with both together, being free to experiment without the pressure to produce, is often rare. Just as unusual is to find a guide to help you illuminate the unnoticed corners in your work.

The San Francisco Conservatory of Dance is addressing this problem through a mentorship program for aspiring choreographers. The Choreographic Apprentice Residency gives young choreographers support for their work and adds another dimension to the school's curriculum. [more...](#)

Naharin's "gaga" Language and Choreography

At the Conservatory Year Round

Emmaly Wiederholt first attended the Conservatory during a summer program in 2006, an experience which influenced her to push her graduation from University a semester early and join the SFCD year-round program. She said, "I really feel like the [Conservatory's] approach regarding training and the refreshing idealism motivating students and teachers alike is unique. I am so thrilled to be in a place where there is such focus. Being here is forcing me to reevaluate not only my technique in a facile sense but also my very conceptions of what dance is and the choices dancers make. Basically, I'm loving every minute."

The year-round program at the SF Conservatory of Dance is uniquely structured to provide an intimate group of dancers, ages 17-23, an environment to focus their training in the pursuit of their individual artistic goals. Under the tutelage of Conservatory Director Summer Lee Rhatigan and Resident Choreographer Alex Ketley, the dancers spend 22 hours each week in the study of classical technique and choreographic exploration. Throughout the year, guest artists from the Bay Area dance community work with the students

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sept. 2007**
Malinda LaVelle and **Toni Lum**, from the University of Arizona, and **Joy Prendergast**, from the University of Utah, joined the SFCD year-round program.
- **Sept. – Dec., 2007**
Manuelito Biag, director of [SHIFT >>> Physical Theater](#), set a new work on students.
- **Nov. 2007**
Toni Lum, Malinda LaVelle, Hallie Hunt, and Chloe Felesina performed with SFCD Resident Choreographer Alex Ketley in **ICARUS/RISE, the world premiere** of a multi-disciplinary performance piece incorporating

Added to SFCD Curriculum

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Mr. Naharin is artistic director of the highly-acclaimed Batsheva Dance Company in Tel Aviv, Israel, which was originally co-founded by Martha Graham in 1964. Among the effusive press Naharin's choreography has received, Dance Magazine critic Wendy Perron wrote the following after seeing the piece *Three* at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in October 2006, "*Three* was so beautiful I could almost not bear it. Simple and complex, soft and powerful, giddy and solemn, it was the kind of piece you want to linger over."



Having worked with many icons of contemporary ballet and modern dance across the globe, Mr. Naharin background is extensive. Born Born in Tel Aviv, he left Israel at age 22 for New York City to study at the Martha Graham School and School of American Ballet. He then fine-tuned his training at the Juilliard School before moving into the professional sphere where he performed with the Martha Graham Dance Company and Maurice Béjart Ballet before setting out to create his own work. After spending ten years choreographing in New York City, he returned to Tel Aviv in 1990 to accept the post of artistic director of the Batsheva Dance Company. Mr. Naharin is also the recipient of several honors for choreography and others which set him apart from his peers such as a Doctorate of Philosophy awarded by the Weizmann Institute of Science, and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres awarded by the French government.

But aside from the remarkable training, illustrious career, and accolades, what makes Mr. Naharin unique, and his work a point of study for SFCD, is his method of moving called "gaga". This form of dance, or dance language, is highly experiential and encourages authenticity as well as joy in movement. Directions are given primarily in images as opposed to steps, and the object is to cultivate one's own way of moving through sensations. Joy Goodwin of the *New York Times* explains, "Imagery — say, the suggestion of rubbing oil into the skin — stimulates imagination and movement. Dancers are encouraged to explore their weaknesses and break old movement habits. Other exercises focus on the placement of the body in space and developing sensitivity to the energy of the dancers nearby." Mr. Naharin has also explained that gaga teaches, "pleasure and effort, madness and demons, and all the things that really create an interesting performer."

One-day gaga workshops taught by members of the Batsheva Company in New York City at Steps on Broadway, Dance New Amsterdam, and Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet have been filled to capacity. SFCD's approach to learning gaga will go far beyond those workshops over the course of several weeks.

Offered to qualifying students 18 to 23 during Session 3 of the 2008 Summer Intensive Program, the Naharin curriculum is designed to immerse dancers into this new way of moving, treating it as a language to be used as a vehicle for personal expression. Students will dive head first into the nuance and intricate detail of the movement language.

By virtue of the fact that language is ever-evolving, the Conservatory expects that as students become fluent in it they will also contribute to its evolution. While previous workshops may have taught participants the skeleton of gaga, SFCD students will explore the bones by deconstruction--taking them apart to see what lies underneath, and reassembling the joints to see, with the new knowledge acquired, how the body stands.

with the students, creating the rare opportunity of a close working-relationship between choreographer and dancer, an experience hard to come by unless dancers are members of the choreographer's company.

This past fall, Manuelito Biag, director of SHIFT >>> Physical Theater, spent three-months with the dancers in the creation of a new work. Manuelito, named a "major new talent" in the San Francisco Chronicle's "[Top 10 dance events of 2007](#)," draws on a variety of influences for source material: for his untitled piece for the Conservatory, dancers worked with his movement phrases, contemporary poetry, and lyrics from pop songs. Manuelito has since asked Conservatory dancers Virginia Fung and Malinda LaVelle to work with him on his upcoming project sponsored by Margaret Jenkin's CHIME award.

-Julia Hollas

AUDITIONS
[Auditions for the Conservatory's summer program](#) are ongoing until March 8. (Video auditions accepted through March 1.)

See website for [audition information](#) and requirements.

contemporary Iranian poetry, music, dance, and film.

- **Jan. 1-4, 2008**
Twenty-two dedicated dancers begun their year with SFCD, dancing 6 hours a day in the annual **Winter Workshop**, lead by Summer Lee Rhatigan and Alex Ketley.
- **Jan., 2008**
Erin Craig, on leave from New College of Florida, and **Emmaly Wiederholt**, recent graduate of the University of Utah's Ballet Department, joined the year-round program.
- **Jan. 2008**
Conservatory students Chloe Felesina, Miguele DeQuadros, and Sara Hoenes are **traveling through Europe**, taking class with companies such as Nederlands Dans Theater II, the Forsythe Company, and Nacho Duato's Compañía Nacional de Danza.

TO COME

SFCD faculty members are extremely excited about this opportunity for students. Glenn Edgerton (associate artistic director of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago) describes Naharin's technique as, "an overall comprehensive study in the motion of the body delving into the fundamentals of impetus, space, momentum, energy, and recovery. It's a physical investment in movement and an in-depth look into the range of qualities the body can encompass." Christian Burns adds, "I'm certain that [this] new approach to technique and creative development, especially by such a renowned artist, will be hugely beneficial to all that can participate."

In an interview with Mr. Naharin, journalist Patricia Boccadoro asked what he believed was important in life. He replied, "Love, forgiveness, and the joy of movement; dance which means going beyond limits." The Conservatory looks forward to studying the ideas of a man who can reveal his integrity in words as well as movement.

-Heather McCalden

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Faculty Interview: Thomas McManus

MK. Thomas, can you give us a bit of biographical information, just to introduce you to readers who haven't had the opportunity to meet you?

TM. Of course. I come from a farm in the middle of Illinois and a big Irish family—six older brothers and sisters. When you get nine people in a house, there is always something going on; the kinetic energy is unavoidable so I was riding on that kind of energy for all of my childhood. I started dancing when I was 16, went to the North Carolina School of the Arts when I was 17, and at 18 landed in ABT 2, albeit as an apprentice. They paid me \$60 a week and I slept in a loft bed above a friend's washing machine. I lived in New York from 1981-86, and during that time worked with many different modern and ballet choreographers. I remember working with Helgi Tomasson once, but I can't remember the name of the ballet.

After five years in New York, I felt like I was ready for something new. So when [choreographer] Ann Marie DeAngelo told me about William Forsythe and the Ballet Frankfurt, I went. I didn't really know much about him when I got there, but it turned out to be the best place for me. When I eventually left in 1999, Bill authorized me to teach his repertory—which I have since been doing for various companies around the world, in addition to doing my own choreography and teaching classes and workshops.

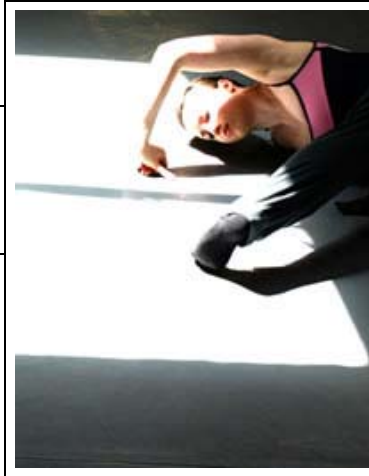
MK. How did working with Mr. Forsythe influence the development of your own artistic work as a dancer and choreographer?

TM. When I went to Frankfurt I was looking for an artistic home, a particular point of view to have experienced and to come from. In New York there is so much of everything and I think it is a great place to get new experiences, but it was hard for me to find a place where the art I wanted to make was being done--and was getting enough funding to actually pay the dancers!

As dancers, we influenced each other. Over the 13 years I was there, we got to know each other's habits, good points and bad. He [Forsythe] has a brilliant mind so I don't think any of us could predict what was going to come next, but on a physical level the stylistic language of the Frankfurt Ballet became a common denominator we all understood.

One thing I most admired about him was that he embraced the ephemeral reality of live dancing and used that as a model of how to keep himself motivated, to stay focused and continue searching for the new within himself. He never apologized for having contradicted himself, which he often did, and at first I wanted him to be consistent, like most teachers I have had. But after awhile I observed a kind of rich quality being built into the work through his meandering logic; and I realized that his work wasn't great because he was "perfect," it was more because he was so honestly human and himself.

MK. Last summer, one of the many images you offered us was the comparison of the process of improvisation to a door opening in your mind. What do you think improvisation, particularly task-based work, offers to a dancer? How can they develop that sort of creative



- **Jan-Feb, 2008**
In addition to the [2008 Audition Tour](#), Conservatory Director Summer Lee Rhatigan will teach master classes at Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle; Los Angeles County High School for the Arts; CalArts, Los Angeles; ARC School of Ballet, Seattle; Cal State University, Long Beach; University of Utah, Salt Lake City; University of Arizona, Tucson; and BodyVox, Portland.
- **Feb. 2008**
Eric Kupers, Co-Director of [Dandelion Dancetheater](#), to set a short work on the year-round students.
- **March 8, 2008**
The **SF Conservatory of Dance Performance Company** will perform a new work by Alex Ketley in the [Dance IS Festival](#) at the Julia Morgan Center for the Arts in Berkeley.
- **March, 2008**
London and

investigation? How do you experience it?

TM. For the first creation I was involved in we focused on creating choreography from everyone's improvisations. Remember, this was 1987, so ballet dancers were not used to choreographers asking for their creative input. Of course, Bill's people had been doing this for a few years before I got there so they would just get up and go! When I was in high school I loved mathematics and a lot of our improv tasks have to do with manipulating real and imagined geometry. Mathematicians say that everything in life can be expressed through numbers--their language. The way that Bill approached improv opened up my everyday life as a source to be described and danced about, and I finally got a sense of the validity of the communicative language of dance.

MK. What was your experience teaching at the Conservatory last year like? What made you decide to return this year, and what do you hope to work on with students this summer?

TM. Great! Everyone was so focused and hard working; I had to hustle to keep up with you all! What the students and teachers pulled together in three weeks really surprised me. Because of this kind of openness to devotion, devotion just to the time period really, I thought it would be interesting to see if we could recreate one of the creative processes of the Ballet Frankfurt. *Hypothetical Stream* was a piece where the dancers were asked to analyze the drawings and paintings of Tiepolo, an Italian Baroque painter, and translate their findings into movement which began the process of combining and subtracting, juxtaposing and manipulating, and evolved into a set piece without improv.

Improvisation Technologies is an educational CD-ROM that we created to help new dancers to our company learn the improv tasks we used in our work. With this tool, I hope we can learn a bunch of the tasks quickly so we can start to use them in a comfortable and familiar way.

MK. What was your favorite dance-related thing that you've seen in the past year?

TM. I've only seen excerpts on YouTube, but there is a film by Édouard Lock and La La La Human Steps called *Amélia*. I like the set and music. I haven't seen the company since 1984! So for me he has made a large evolution, although I hear he stays pretty much in this style of dancing now.

MK. And because I think an interview is more fun when there's just a bit of frivolity, what book or movie or piece of music excites you so much that you want to run out and tell everyone on the street that they must, must, must begin reading, watching, or listening to it right now?

TM. A recording by Janine Jansen of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. She plays this music like it was written yesterday and like it's a matter of life and death!!

I started reading some Samuel Beckett. It's so dense, but after awhile you can get into its specific flow and logic, and it really gets your brain going!

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Summer Choreographic Apprentice Residency

Choreography, at its most basic, is moving bodies in space and through time. Choreographers need to have all three—bodies, space, and time—to practice their art, not to mention the more elusive material of inspiration. Securing these necessities can be difficult, especially for a young, aspiring choreographer. Dancers have schedules, studios are expensive; and getting time with both together, being free to experiment without the pressure to produce, is often rare. Just as unusual is to find a guide to help you illuminate the unnoticed corners in your work.

The San Francisco Conservatory of Dance is addressing this problem through a mentorship program for aspiring choreographers. The Choreographic Apprentice Residency gives young choreographers support for their work and adds another dimension to the school's curriculum. Alex Ketley, a teacher and resident choreographer at the Conservatory, as well as an independent artist, explains that the residency reflects his own experience of working with students. "I feel the Conservatory has contributed tremendously to my development as a choreographer, if for nothing else than allowing me vast amounts of time to experiment and discover what is important to me about my voice."

San Francisco based choreographer [Stephen Pelton](#) returns to the Conservatory to work with the year-round students.

- **July 17-19, 2008**
Conservatory guest teacher **Manuelito Biag** and Resident Choreographer **Alex Ketley** to perform in [Local Heroes: San Francisco's New Traditionalists](#) at Project Artaud, presented by ODC Theater.

- **June 2 – August 9, 2008**
SFCD Summer Intensive programs in session, students will learn repertory by **William Forsythe, Jiri Kylian, and Ohad Naharin**; will also collaborate on new work with choreographers **Alex Ketley, Christian Burns, Robert Moses, and Summer Lee Rhatigan**.

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Finding one's individual voice is vital for any artist, and Summer Lee Rhatigan, the Conservatory's director, believes the collaboration of choreographic work is a way into the process. "I think one of the most important keys to a rich and sustainable career in dance is becoming engaged and inspired by collaborations with artists who know something you don't, or whose ideas stem from different experience."

The first Choreographic Apprentice Residency took place last year, running alongside the Conservatory's annual Summer Intensive Program. Seven choreographers were selected on the basis of applications and auditions. Each choreographer was assigned a small group of dancers and given rehearsal time to use as they wished. At the end of each week, all participants met to show and discuss their work under Alex's guidance.

"I chose the format of weekly group discussion," Alex says, "because I thought the choreographers should have the benefit of multiple points of view, not just my own. I wanted it to function more like a fine art graduate program. I think it is important for young choreographers to have a sense of mentorship, rather than simply going out and blindly finding their way. In other art disciplines, there tends to be a more rigorous sense of needing to know one's art history. I think many young choreographers feel very unsupported."

Malinda LaVelle and Ellen Deutsche, both choreographers during the 2007 Summer Residency, agree that this communication between dancers, choreographers, and teachers inspired and clarified aspects of their own work. Malinda describes the process like this: "The comments I received from teachers and students allowed me and my dancers to consider new ideas and reconsider old ones, which helped me stay fresh with what I was doing." What she found most unique about the program, however, was the continuity of this dialogue. "You didn't first create a piece and then receive criticism. You were able to gradually gain new insight during your entire process from a non-judgmental place." Ellen echoes her appreciation for feedback and adds, "it was exciting to see what other choreographers in my generation are creating. I'd definitely repeat the experience in a heartbeat."

Each week the choreographers took away opinions, suggestions, questions, and explanations to use in their own rehearsals. Most of these rehearsals took place at the end of a very long day of dancing, for both choreographers and dancers; so it was only with heroic stamina and enthusiasm from all that explorations evolved into pieces possessing structure and depth. At the end of the four week program, the choreographers presented their work to an audience of students and faculty.

During the summer of 2008, the Choreographic Apprentice Residency will offer twelve more students the opportunity to create and learn. Professional choreographers Alex Ketley, Christian Burns, and Manuelito Biag will guide students throughout the program. By sharing their experience, and digging into ideas and processes, these choreographers will both serve as mentors and enrich their own work, exploring and learning alongside their students.

-Megan Kurashige

Further information on the 2008 Choreographic Apprentice Residency, including [application requirements and deadlines](#), is available on the SFCD web site.

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