



“Taylor displays an enjoyably forthright approach to modern dance and its mysteries “

Jennifer Dunning
New York Times



Pi Dance Theatre

Mission Statement

The mission of Pi Dance Theatre is to build a creative community of individuals composed of: the public, its Board members, dancers, designers, visual artists, patrons and presenters. Using the works of Toni Taylor and the company's constituents as a catalyst, PDT strives to deepen our collective humanity and further expand the human conversation via dance and other mediums.



Profile

Pi Dance Theatre was formed in New York City by dancer/choreographer Toni Taylor in the fall of 1990. Taylor developed the company not only to create a community of dancers to express her own aesthetic but also to present the works of the company's dancers in the company's performances.

Says Taylor, "I decided a company would provide a structure in which to make the dances I wanted to see and perform in." Toni Taylor decided to call it Pi Dance Theater because she liked the idea of pi (being related to the circumference of a circle) as a visual cue that implies inclusiveness. It also helped her avoid being confused with the prominent Taylors - Paul and June.

Taylor and Pi Dance Theater been reviewed or spotlighted in such publications as: the New York Times, Daily News, Village Voice, New York Post, New York Press, Hartford Courant in Connecticut, and Philadelphia City Weekly.

Collaboration

Taylor relishes the process of collaboration with other artists such as: dancers, composers, visual artists, designers, poets and the audience.





The intent is to work with dancers of varied body types, who move with confidence and a sense of inquiry and metaphor. Taylor gravitates to people who can viscerally share their dancing and their stories with the audience and the other dancers. Ideally the dancers intuitively work together as a cohesive ensemble similar to how the members of jazz quartets and high-level basketball teams seem to know what/where their colleagues are without looking. Over the years, Pi Dance Theatre has included dancers coming from various disciplines, cultures and countries. Such a dialogue with an array of nationalities has also added to her influences and offered her opportunities to bring in disciplines from ethnic dance styles as well.

In 1995, Pi Dance Theatre produced its' first evening length collaboration with composer Dave Drinkwater and poets from the No Chance Ensemble headed by Bruce Weber, **Ambient Spoken Body**. Taylor collaboration with Drinkwater has continued with works such as, **Ecstatic Equilibrium**, which began as a series of conversations between he and Taylor about their differing spiritual studies at the time. **updowninout.allaround** in collaboration with sculptor David Judelson and music arrangement by Drinkwater.

Sketches, a video and theater dance piece in collaboration with poet Jan McLaughlin and the dancers, was inspired by a poem of McLaughlin's written after watching a rehearsal. In further exploration of the possibilities of dance with poetry, the company was also involved with the No Chance Ensemble of poets headed by Bruce Weber resulting in collaborative works such as **Under the Surface** and Everything was a **Symphony to Him**.

Toni's mother, Mikki Taylor, has costumed many of the dances in the company's repertoire, drawing on her history with the choreographer to develop unique outfits for **After the Torch**, **Quiet Persistence**, and **updowninout.allaround**. Many of Taylor's pieces also incorporate an array of props and sculpted production elements. **Bad Behavior** uses yo-yos to play with the notion that bad habits tend to defy our best efforts to rid ourselves of them. The wife and mother in the opening solo of **Peaceful Clan** uses a paper airplane as a message-bearer to an ungrateful family. Ladders and yards of fabric are used in **updowninout.allaround** as a means to explore the conflict between collective and unilateral actions. In **Remaining Vertical**, shadow puppets provide a subtext and an alternative narrative to the dance happening in front dealing with the choices made in a time of tragedy.

Certain programs include a fun piece created by volunteers from the audience, the purpose of which is to provide a light hearted lesson on how dances are created and a way for audiences to appreciate what they've seen. Longtime New York Times dance critic Jennifer Dunning said in reference to an audience participation improvisation, "The piece **Dance on the Spot** made imaginative and funny use of the garden setting. Ms Taylor's impromptu lesson in choreography, cogent and astute, was even more impressive."



Venues

Along the way, PDT has worked in a variety of venues, from loft spaces to traditional theaters. Each space the company has used factors in the relationships between themselves and audiences. As Taylor adds, “If the space is tight, eye contact between dancers and audiences is assured, which makes us think about what we are communicating at a very detailed level. Big spaces let us indulge in a bit of “diva-esque” grandeur. Both are equally fun.” Some of her more unconventional venues include: the 590 Madison Avenue Atrium, Clinton Community Garden, and the lobby of the Times Square Hotel.

Some of the company’s primary concerts include **Coincidental Decade** at University Settlement, 2008 **Remaining Vertical** also at University Settlement in 2006 and Williamsburg Arts Nexus (WAX) in 2004. In 2003 the company performed at the Brooklyn Arts Exchange (BAX) premiering **updowninout.allaround**.

For several years running, the Clinton Community Garden and the 590 Madison has hosted the company for free performances of the **Urban Grove Dancing** series. The 2000 installment at the Clinton Community Garden garnered a glowing review Jennifer Dunning “All three dancers had an ungainly charm and a wonderfully relaxed way of engaging the audience in **String Theory**; set to Bach and **Roving to Join** set to an intriguing score by Dave Drinkwater that sounded like music that might emanate from 4th of July sparklers.”

For several years in the early to mid 90’s, the company’s involvement with Common Ground at the Times Square Hotel gave the company another venue in which to perform the annual series. The company offered a free summer dance season in the lobby for the special needs clients and residents of this flagship subsidized housing facility.

To further expand it’s reach, The Hole in the Wall Theatre in New Britain, Connecticut has hosted PDT several times. While in town, PDT also offers master classes at the local college, high school, and constituents of The Hole in the Wall. In 2003, the company was pleased to participate in New Britain’s first Fall Arts Festival. The company has traveled to Philadelphia to be part of “Aukstruckdanz” for Michael Carson at the Group Motion studio.

Over the years, Pi Dance Theatre has endeavored to expand the public’s artistic horizon, contribute to the human conversation, while encouraging the creation and presentation of new works by the company’s members.





Toni Taylor - Founder and Artistic Director



Prior to her arrival in New York City, the Kansas City native spent 6 years in Boston where she had performed with Caitlin Corbett, the Betty Fain Dancers and choreographed numerous small pieces.

Stylistically she has deepened her understanding of the Horton technique and how it can be used as an expressive medium by studying with Milton Meyers, JoLea Maffei, Regina Larkin and Joy Kellman in New York and Susan Rose in Boston. Her own solo and group improvisations continue to be the springboard for her to gather movement material that is then distilled into a more formal structure.

Taylor was a member of Dancers Forum, a group doing advocacy work to develop the professional dance community. She was also an Artist Representative to the Artist Congress, a group sponsored by The Field in New York City to address issues of importance to the arts community by taking those concerns to funders and arts services organizations to craft solutions.

Recognized by peers as a choreographer with insights into the process of dance creation and production, she has been invited to write profiles for fellow dancers such as Sean Curran of Sean Curran Dance in New York and David Bogler's Cois Ciem Dance Company from Ireland, both published by the Irish Connection. She has also submitted reviews to DanceInsider.com and articles on dance in the Clinton Chronicle.

Over the past 20 years, Taylor has established more than 25 modern dance performance pieces in her work for Pi Dance Theater and other collaborative efforts. These works reflect a range of aesthetics that are consistent with her interest in creating intelligent work for varied body types; especially those that defy the usual dance model.

Says Taylor; "My involvement with Pi Dance Theatre and the larger dance community over the years continues to inspire me to explore the possibilities of modern dance and other media. The amazing people involved in these mediums continue to drive the global conversation of the human condition that has always compelled me."



Themes

Taylor's pieces layer and weave topics and themes together. Some favorite themes are: spirituality, human foibles, and relationships. In the **Empyrean** we reflect on the possibility of beauty in the form of music in the afterlife. **Ecstatic Equilibrium** began as a series of conversations between composer David Drinkwater and Taylor about their differing spiritual studies at the time. Human foibles are explored in pieces such as **Remaining Vertical**, where differences between freely made choices and those forced on us are considered. Relationships are an overarching theme in **Peaceful Clan** where the seething tensions under the façade of familial bliss are shown.





Dancers



Tomomi Imai came to New York 2001. She performed as a soloist with several companies in Japan, where performances are sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Culture. Her choreography has been presented at several theaters in Tokyo and won second prize at the Kita-Kiyushu and the Asia National Modern Dance Competition, Akita Modern Dance Competition and grand prize at the Matsudo Art society Competition. She dances with the Pi Dance Theater, Regina Larkin, The Dance Imprints, Maxine Steinman, HoffTanzt, and performed in Agora. She has taught at Adelphi University, Peridance, Montclair Academy of Dance and Laboratory of Music. She also teaches Pilates in the New York City area.

Chriselle Tidrick has a varied performance life which includes work in modern dance, acrobatics, stilt dancing and aerial dance. Her modern dance training includes such diverse styles as Humphrey-Limonn, Duncan, Horton and release techniques and is supplemented by a background in ballet. Chriselle has performed with Jody Sperling/Time Lapse Dance, Alice Farley Dance Theater, the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, Catherine Gallant/DANCE, Dances by Isadora, among others. She also appears on stilts in the Disney motion picture, Enchanted. Chriselle is grateful to have danced with Pi Dance Theatre since 2003 and for the guidance and generosity Toni has offered in the founding of her company, Above and Beyond Dance.



Dana Doggett is originally from Ohio and graduated with a degree in Art History from Skidmore College, where Toni Smith and Deborah Hay inspired her to become a performer. Since moving to New York, Dana has become a massage therapist, and has enjoyed performing throughout the New York area, most recently with Murray Spaulding Movement Arts, Chris Ferris and Dancers and Tina Croll and Company.

Pi Dance Theatre alumni have also worked with other productions such as Michael Bourne's "Swan Lake" on Broadway, the New York Theater Workshop's production of "Vienna: LustHause Revisited," and with the Martha Graham company.



Repertory (a sampling)

Remaining Vertical



With four dancers and two puppeteers, using modern dance and shadow puppets, the piece considers how we keep going in the face of all obstacles, including capricious gods who sometimes save us, and sometimes don't.

Music: Ghazal

Set Design: Brian Pekarsky

Puppeteering: Dana Doggett and Brian Pekarsky

Empyrean



For five dancers, "Empyrean" is inspired by a painting by the American Indian painter Paul Deo that considers that the idea that after a long hard life, the empyic sphere might be a really cool place. Is it possible that beauty in the form of music in the afterlife exists?

Music: Northwind and Modern Jazz Quartet

Costumes: Estelle Star

Ecstatic Equilibrium

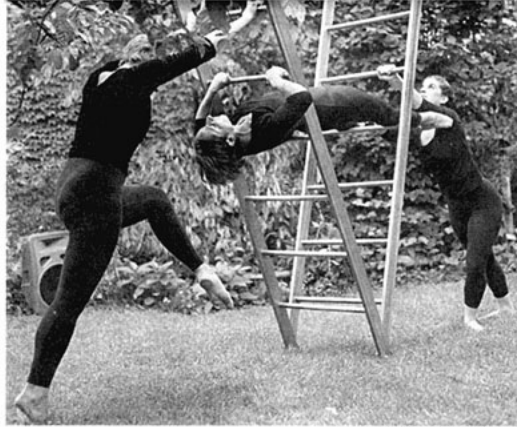


With a cast of five, Taylor considers that fulcrum of energetic space between too much and too little stress. In three sections, the happy medium between the extremes is presented.

Music: David Drinkwater



Press Clippings



Julie Lemberger for The New York Times

Toni Taylor, Nicole Lichau and Jillian Sweeney of the Pi Dance Theater.

DANCE REVIEW

Urban Venuses Easy at Play On Bucolic West 48th Street

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Toni Taylor and her Pi Dance Theater took to a patch of lush grass in the Clinton Community Garden on Saturday afternoon and summoned up all the pleasure of the unexpected in a city where surprise is a constant. Passers-by stopped to peer into the garden on West 48th Street, one of them with a chortling green parrot on her shoulder.

Inside, ringed by trees and patches of tall flowers, Ms. Taylor and her two performers presented outdoor dances that responded un-self-consciously to their setting, with magical simplicity.

The most enjoyable of the program's three formal works was "Ladders," a trio set to the music of Thomas Tallis and George Crumb. "Ladders" began with Ms. Taylor winding around a tall ladder, swathing it in the off-white fabric that had bound her. Then she unwound the fabric into a bundle, unwound her gray turban to tie the bundle with, then tossed the thing away. "Trust me, this is really a dance," her eyes seemed to say as she stared boldly out at the audience seated around

her on the grass and on rustic benches.

Nicole Lichau and Jillian Sweeney lifted the ladder and formed a tower with another. What followed was witty shape play for suspended and climbing bodies, until the ladders were turned to form a V from which the dancers rose like urban Venuses.

Delicately slender and mysterious, Ms. Lichau looked like something that might have been growing in the garden. Ms. Sweeney was a compelling, natural yet stylish mover.

All three dancers had an ungainly charm and a wonderfully relaxed way of engaging the audience in "String Theory," set to Bach, and "Roving to Join," set to an intriguing score by David Drinkwater that sounded like the music that might emanate from Fourth of July sparklers.

In "Dance on the Spot" Ms. Taylor was midwife to a piece created by three audience volunteers: Jodi Collova, Eric Massa and LeeAnn Ledgerwood, a musician who had been passing by and came in to see what was going on. The piece, performed with Ms. Sweeney and Ms. Lichau, made imaginative and funny use of the garden setting. Ms. Taylor's impromptu lesson in choreography, cogent and astute, was even more impressive.

MEMORIES LAST A LIFETIME:
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