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Site-Specific Performance Blooms at Botanic Garden

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The blossoms are gone on Brooklyn Botanic Garden's (BBG) famous Cherry Esplanade, their delicate beauty replaced by another charm. In the late-setting sun a woman steps onto the grass, walking in arcs quite different from our normal, linear paths. Seven others join her, eight curving paths uniting in two intersecting lines like geese flocking; eight bodies fold and ripple. The lines melt. Running, leaping, the dancers make their way toward us down the long lawn.

Brooklyn choreographer Yanira Castro is the BBG's first ever site-specific performer. "We knew she would be inspired by the garden. Yanira's work exists moment-to-moment in the space in which it's been created," says BBG Communications Manager Kate Blumm. "She deals with the energy of the environment. No one will ever mistake this piece for being anywhere but at the BBG."

"Wilderness: Paradis" is the flip side of Castro's "Wilderness" installation performed last October in Cobble Hill's The Invisible Dog. BBG had wanted Wilderness, but Castro felt it was too intense and awkward for the pastoral setting. Paradis is light, Edenic, perfect for the garden.

The BBG's new site-work initiative aims to maximize their biggest asset, space, by expanding programming beyond the garden's well-attended, large, daytime events. Beautiful at night, the light ethereal, the garden plans to schedule unusual, after-work and weekend evening events, hoping to build interest among a local constituency, in particular 20 to 30 year-olds, many of who have a generational relationship with the garden.

Wilderness and Paradis are companion pieces connected by Castro's methodology — film as a jumping-off point — the implementation of the music, and their structure. Both pieces open with Peter Schmitz's solo, then follow with group and duet sections. A walking pattern, which Castro calls a rhythm, appears in both.

Tired of self-referential work, Castro decided that though she would craft it, none of Wilderness' movement would come from her. "I didn't make a step," she says.

She turned to Schmitz, whom she'd met as a student at Amherst College, who always fascinated her. Schmitz's solos are well-defined improvisations co-structured with room for his individualistic timing, duration and rhythm. Dedicated to performing and the process, Schmitz's daily work ethic leads to intensely realized performances. Like peering into a diorama or a dolls house, Schmitz's Paradis solo, seen through the windows of the garden's Dessert Pavilion, is intense and full of careful, delicate, mysterious gestures.

Schmitz and Castro worked for nine months developing his Wilderness solo. She would watch him improvise, take notes, extrapolate. The crimped, crippled-seeming hands that accompany the walk that ties the two works to each other was created this way. Castro says they have different approaches. She likes the simplicity and clarity of a single gesture, he likes development — if hands-shaken-over-head is good, why not try it at shoulder height, in front.

For the first Wilderness, Schmitz's hours of improvising also provided movement for the other dancers. Castro cut video of Schmitz's rehearsals into tiny snippets traced over spreadsheets. The other performers learned the phrases exactly as Schmitz danced them. Once learned, the dancers individualized them making them larger, smaller, more classical or more interior. "But really," Castro laughs, Wilderness "was all about Peter." For Paradis, everyone worked with the same

cinematic source material. "It's almost a reverse. Peter took a lot of material from the group dance and made it his own."

Castro often derives texture for her dances from visual and literary sources, but the extent of film's influence on *Wilderness* and *Paradis* is unusual and, Castro suspects, specific to these works. Cinematic sections captured her attention — a woman walking away from, and back toward the camera, for example. Castro pared down such film gestures and images to hints or reflections. For *Wilderness*, a conversation about the importance of leaving a legacy, drawn from Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru*, and a scene from Mexican director Carlos Reygadas' *Japon*, particularizing the detailed, physical considerations between a lame, depressed 50-year old man and 80-something year old woman who have decided they want to have sex, were primary. *Paradis* draws on the final section of Jean-Luc Goddard's *Notre Musique*, also called *Paradis*. An apple, eaten in Goddard's film, appears as a gesture in Schmitz's solo, reappearing towards the end of the group work.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the *Wilderness* pieces is the sound design by Stephan Moore — live piano creating a new, live score for each performance by Michael Dauphinais. Moore designed a computer program that translates audience movement — via contact mics at *Invisible Dog*, via video in the garden — into pitches. The program then translates the pitches into notes that Dauphinais reads from a computer feed. The live feed comes so rapidly he can only respond to the rolling notes during Schmitz's solo; at the garden, the sound is carried via walkie-talkie held by four assistants surrounding the audience. The second time the music enters, in the garden during the Octet on the Esplanade, the same notes are fed at half speed allowing Dauphinais room for expressive interpretation. Castro found the piano at Materials for the Arts. It will be moved to the garden one night prior to opening. Unprotected, the piano's sound will change reacting to the weather.

Site-specific work is unpredictable. After developing intricate, resonant movement in the studio, Castro realized that little was visible in the dimming light over the long distance of the Esplanade. So Castro's been stripping the movement to its core, the intricacy reappearing during circling, leaping phrases after the dancers reach the audience.

Castro, who has always built the audience into her work, is increasingly interested in how the audience behaves; *Wilderness* changed how she sees the performer/audience relationship. "It perplexes me and I think the difficulty of it draws me to it. I want to allow the audience to discover the next thing rather than being told what to do. I'm no longer interested," she says in creating a world for her dancers to inhabit. "I've lost my taste for metaphor. I'm trying to make work that's nothing but itself, not inspired by something or capturing something, it's task-ful. I want to discover a way to make dance that's new each night."
