

# MENDANCE

AGAINST THE GRAIN SINCE 1996

## HISTORY

In 1994, Richard Jessup, a Seattle dancer/choreographer envisioned an evening of dance performed and choreographed entirely by men. Eight Seattle dancers were invited to participate in a discussion that included their personal history in dance and their vision of contribution to the proposed project. The participants included Seattle choreographers Raymond Houle, Wade Madsen, Professor of Dance at Cornish College of the Arts, Rip Parker, Gary Reed, Gérard Théorêt, David Silverman and Christian Swenson. Jessup and Tim Talty submitted and received funds from King County Arts Commission to produce the concert. Shortly after receiving the Grant, Jessup and Théorêt's careers took them temporarily out of state. Houle administered the grant and with new Seattle transplant Jack Yantis moved forward to produce the first festival of, Against The Grain/Men In Dance (ATG/MID) in late May of 1996.

With the success of its first performance at Seattle's Freehold Theatre, ATG/MID was established. Musical theater artist Kyle Cable joined Houle and Yantis to continue developing the project. ATG/MID was incorporated in January 1998 and granted 501c3 status. The corporation has operated with an advisory/producing board of five to six dance professionals ever since. 1998 also included the addition of women choreographers Laura Curry, Vicki Lloyd, Whitman College, and Deborah Wolf, Professor of Dance at Cornish College of the Arts. This biennial festival moved to two consecutive weekends with sixteen emerging and established choreographers. 1998 also marked the first year of an ongoing association with the children's modern dance company, Kaleidoscope Dance. The boys of Kaleidoscope performed in a work by Tom Truss and Jesse Jaramillo.

In 2000, the Millennium Festival featured twenty-one choreographers from Eastern Washington, New York, Seattle, Tacoma and Canada. Included in the artist roster were Philip Borunda, Chris Daigre, Stanley Knaub, Kabby Mitchell III, Professor of Dance at Evergreen State College, A.C. Petersen, Crispin Spaeth, and Maynard Stewart, Principal Dancer with Pacific Northwest Ballet.

2002 marked The Best of the Fest, a single weekend production that included favorite works from previous festivals. ATG/MID also previewed with a concert at Bainbridge Performing Arts Center. These performances were in memoriam to Stanley Knaub, who had served as a member of the producing team in 2000.

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The 2004 Festival returned to the two-weekend format with a change of venue from the Freehold Theater to the larger Velocity MainSpace Theater. This program welcomed many new artists to the Festival including established choreographers Mark Haim, Peter Kyle and Jason Ohlberg; Brian Joe from the New York-based Ballets Grand Diva performing *The Dying Swan*, and a team of improvisers that included Scott Davis, John Dixon, and Sean Ryan.

The 2006 Festival ran for two-weekends in October at Velocity MainSpace Theatre, tying for best dance performance by the Seattle Times. We also returned to the Bainbridge Performing Arts Center to launch their new dance series. The roster represented previous artists such as Houle, Madsen, Ohlberg, Reed, Théorêt, Wolf, and the originator of *Men In Dance*, Richard Jessup. Other new artists included Donald Byrd, Spectrum Dance Theater, Olivier Wevers, Principal Dancer with Pacific Northwest Ballet, and Spanish dance artist Pilar Villaneuva selected from an applicant pool.

With ever growing audiences and support we moved the Festival to Seattle's Broadway Performance Hall in October of 2008. The two weekend run was very successful. Introduced to our roster of choreographers were Steve Casteel, Dominique Gabella, Jurg Koch Professor of Dance at the University of Washington, Daniel Wilkins Director of DASSdance, tap artist Anthony Peters, our team of improvisers, John Dixon, Scott Davis and Aaron Swartzman returned with a lobby piece, and Ben Maestas III created our first outdoor site specific work. In an effort to connect with the performing arts community we initiated a reciprocal ticket discount program with Seattle Children's Theater, Spectrum Dance Theater, and the University of Washington.

The 8<sup>th</sup> festival in October of 2010 proved to be a success. Holding the performances at Broadway Performance Hall again, we brought back some of our strongest choreographers while adding new local and out of state talent. Some returning choreographers were, Wade Madsen, Deborah Wolf, Olivier Wevers and Donald Byrd; whom created a solo for Peter Boal, Artistic Director of Pacific Northwest Ballet. New to our Roster were, Sonia Dawkins, Alia Swersky, Barry Kerollis, and Eva Stone. We were also glad to have two dancers from the Portland, OR based company Northwest Dance Project (Artistic Director Sarah Slipper) to perform a work created by returning choreographer Gérard Théorêt. As part of our continued community outreach we promoted a ticket exchange with other performing organizations again, such as University of Washington's Chamber Dance Company. We also participated in the first Arts Crush, which connects artists and audience with invigorating new experiences such as our festival. Audience attendance and critical acclaim tells us that our mission is working.

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The next and 9th Against The Grain/Men in Dance Festival returns to Broadway Performance Hall in October 2012. Reflecting our mission to include many artists and genres of dance, we are currently under way to add new choreographers and dancers. Serving as a diversified role model for the male dancers of tomorrow we also hope to include a new piece created through collaboration with local students and a professional teacher/choreographer.

Sincerely,

The producing team: Kyle Cable, Steve Casteel, Brenda Howald, Richard Jessup, Brian Joe, Gary Reed, Gérard Théorêt, and Deborah Wolf.