

Marshmallows and Robots

Story and interview by Claudia Lomax

As Copious Dance Theater is preparing for its home season in May at Z Space San Francisco, artistic director Kat Worthington is gearing up to teach one of her Horton technique classes at Alonzo King Lines Dance Center.

After a few years of teaching, she has earned herself a regular following among dancers from Berkeley, to San Francisco, from China and Switzerland. Here is a candid interview with Kat who is always on the run between classes, rehearsals, meetings and in short, taking care of business. With her first home season on the menu, I felt lucky to catch Kat for a conversation before she started teaching her class.

In The Beginning

CL: Your Horton technique classes and your classroom choreography have interested plenty of dancers and even critics. How did you start teaching?

When I then moved to San Francisco and was given an opportunity to teach at Lines by then dance director Pam Hagen since no one was teaching this technique. I remember having 3 or 5 students in my classes. My classes are physically demanding and I expect my students to give me 100% [see “Come ‘on Marshmallows...Move!” later in this article] starting from the warm up, to adagios, to practicing some Copious Dance Theater Repertory choreography at the end of class. I'm delighted that not only new students are joining, from beginner dancers, doctors, engineers to professional dancers, but also many original students have been continuously attending my classes. My classes now average 20 students. All seem to enjoy the continuous flow of the class as well as the strength that they gain by practicing the Horton technique.

I'm amazed how much progress some of my regular students have made not only in my class, but also in the other dance forms that they are practicing such as Ballet or Salsa. [Kat smiles]



Photo: Marcus J. Ranum
Dancer: Kat Worthington Artistic Director of Copious Dance Theater

CL: Why did you choose to teach the Modern Dance Technique of Lester Horton?

Kat: While studying dance at the Ailey School in NYC many years ago I fell in love with the Horton technique because it seems to create long and strong incredible dancers that are able to do anything a choreographer asks of them. I also love that it is a codified technique. Like Ballet, there is correct method and approach to each dance movement. The technique Lester Horton created is extremely logical and it makes “sense”. The lines or each Horton position are very easy to understand, but rather difficult to achieve and this makes the technique appealing to beginners as well as advanced students. It’s either a “lateral-T” or it’s not. There is no gray area and you are constantly striving towards perfection. Just “flopping in the breeze” is not going to cut it in a Horton class. In short the structure, clarity and the benefits of studying Horton fascinate me.

“Come ‘on Marshmallows...Move!”

CL: You are a hands-on teacher. You not only show most of the movements, you also do the dance with groups of students, almost all out. Because of your intensity and motivation, you are heard to say your signature phrases such as “move marshmallows” or “try not to move like a robot”.



Kat Worthington teaching a Horton Technique class at Alonzo King Lines Dance Center in San Francisco

Kat: [smiles, then gets serious] If you show up to be a part of dance class I expect you to give me your best and your all. I encourage them. I know they all are capable and I see it in them. And yes, I admit that saying “move it, marshmallows” used to be a common phrase [smiles again]. But, these students have improved so much that I rarely need to say anything. They are so motivated. As for the “robot” statement: I encourage them to do more than just sticking their limbs out into space. Learning how to use transition in movements is what sets a skilled dancer apart from the rest. In summary, I love teaching my students. They all inspire me.

Aspire to Inspire

CL: Speaking of inspiration, you told me a while back that the impetus for founding Copious Dance Theater in 2009 stemmed from persistent demands from your students.

Kat: As all other dance teachers with devoted students, I'm flattered by my dancers' enthusiasm, courage and intensity during classes. Many of them constantly encouraged me to start a dance company so they could perform with me or just to see the work on a stage. Finally, I decided that the time was right.

Copious Dance Theater began its crawling phase late in 2009. We performed at several venues and festivals around the Bay Area, South Bay and North Bay. Luckily, we have received praises by the critics and fellow teachers and choreographers. We are encouraged and will have our first Home Season in May at Z Space in San Francisco. We are ready for our walking phase.

Secret's Lament: A Home Season

CL: Could you please give a sneak preview of Copious' show in May?

Kat: We'll perform at Z Space (formerly Theater Artaud, San Francisco) from May 13 through 15. The production is titled *Secret's Lament* and is a collaboration between myself and award-winning vocalist and composer, Katy Stephan. I chose Z Space in San Francisco for our home season because of its 64-foot deep stage and spacious seating. I love big athletic movement.

The show includes four works. I'm choreographing all the pieces with an exception of one which was created by the choreographer, Rogelio Lopez from Los Angeles. In addition, my workshop students will perform the result of their 10 week intensive training.

Abundance

CL: Before we close our talk, what's the story behind the name of your dance company?

Kat: Copious means abundance. For me, founding Copious is a way of giving back to the Creator and the community which has been copiously given to me and our dancers. I'm thankful to the incredible artistry of dancers around me and all who are involved as volunteers, our financial supporters. To be true to our words and give back to our community, company dancers have volunteered at the Glide Memorial Church feeding over 800 meals to less fortunate people in the tenderloin. These people are our neighbors and we walk passed them every day on our way to rehearsal. They are part of our experience of rehearsing at Lines Dance Center and they should also have part in the blessings we receive. In addition, we performed in a fund raising event for brain tumor research sponsored by UCSF.

CL: Well, I will let you finish preparing for your Horton class. I need to get ready for a dance class soon and you seem ready to teach your class. Thanks for the talk.

Kat: Thanks for the chat. Now, don't be a marshmallow in class [smiles, puts on her iPod and continues choreographing]

End.

Claudia Lomax is a pseudonym.

For more information on classes, workshops and Copious visit www.copiousdance.org.

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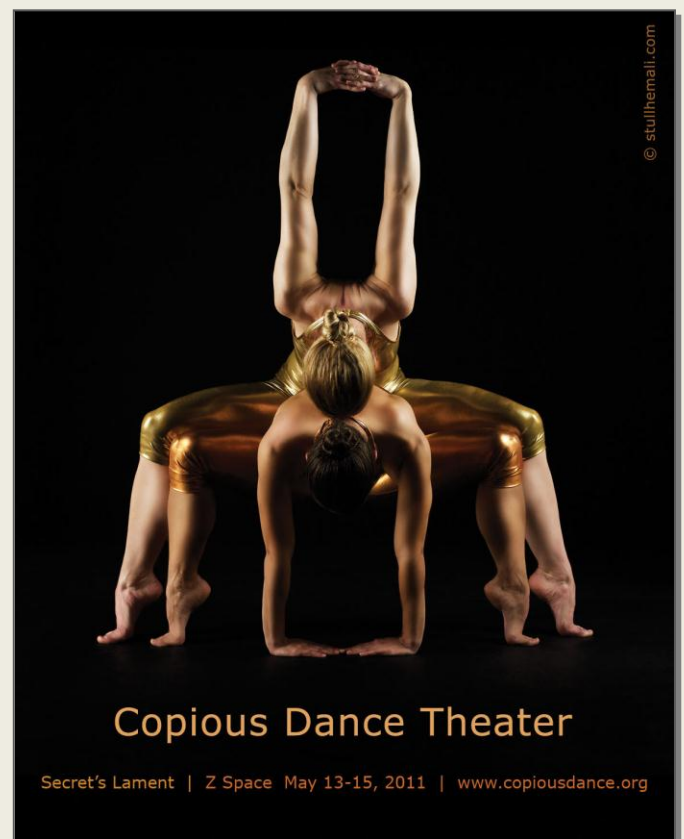


Photo by Hemali Acharya Zaveri . Discounted pre-sale tickets are available online at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/158763>