

David Roussève/REALITY *Stardust*

“One day, some breakthrough string-theory of the heart is sure to explain why beauty and damnation can be perceived at the same moment, why grief and joy can hit you at once. Until then, David Roussève’s dance-theater... offers a succinct and lyrical look at how the highs and lows of life collide.”

Sarah Kaufman,
The Washington Post



David Rousseve/REALITY

Stardust

World Premiere, January 2014



Photo: Valerie Oliveira

"Contradictory, perverse, uplifting - (Rousseve's) theater distills the essence of truth, and it is potent."

*The Star Ledger
(Newark)*

Commissioned by:

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Choreographed, written, and directed by David Rousseve, *Stardust* explores the evolving nature of intimacy in our technology-driven, furiously-paced world. Redefining the coming of age story for the electronic age, the evening-length piece follows a gay African American teen as he negotiates a difficult adolescence. *Stardust* follows this urban, distraught, yet relentlessly hopeful protagonist as he searches for the meaning of love and compassion in a life that seems bereft of both. The teenager never appears on stage as a "character" and no performer "plays" him live. We know him by the (projected) text messages he sends (but that no one answers), by the fantastical imagery created in his mind, by the sounds that both comfort and challenge him, and by the abstract dance movements that are the analog of his states of mind and heart.

His unanswered texts ultimately chronicle a startling journey from despair into the most unexpected of transformations. Written by Rousseve, they are projected onto multiple surfaces in video by long time collaborator Cari Ann Shim Sham. The *Stardust* video also contains a series of Skype calls from a sympathetic yet unruly Grandfather character; and abstract imagery referencing majestic night skies and swirling nebula that reinforce *Stardust's* underlying spiritual themes. The sound score juxtaposes the intimate romanticism of Nat King Cole standards with the rough-edged, hip hop-based original music of d. Sabela Grimes. Lush, jazz-inflected dancing choreographed by Rousseve to the lyricism of Cole is leavened by frenetic, angular representations of the protagonist's anxious states of mind. Designer Christopher Kuhl's lighting will support both the emotional textures and surreal quality of the work. Dramaturg Lucy Burns will serve as an outside eye to help keep these contrasting elements in dynamic balance.

Stardust is the first REALITY work with no spoken text and the first in which Rousseve will not perform lead. He writes, "Removing myself has been exhilarating: I can focus on developing a more dynamic movement language--long a goal--unlimited by my own body. While it is paramount that my work retain its emotional resonance, my giving the protagonist 'voice' only through short written text allows for a more fluid choreographic structure uninterrupted by the character monologues I usually deliver. I am thrilled by this leap forward in my work."



"*Stardust*" was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and additional funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Met Life Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding provided by Investing in Artists grant from the Center for Cultural Innovation, the University of CA Institute for Research in the Arts, and the UCLA Faculty Research Grants program.

about David Roussèvre

"David Roussèvre is one of the most provocative figures on the modern dance scene: a multi talented artist, a low-key but incisively compelling performer eloquent in both words and movement, and a choreographer of wide-ranging imagination. His vibrant theater pieces tend toward the surreal with occasionally a non-sequitor Dadaist touch."

The Washington Times



Photo: Valerie Oliveira

David Roussèvre is hailed from coast to coast for his highly original form of expressionistic dance theater that masterfully blends elements of dance and performance art with African American traditional and pop cultures. As Artistic Director of the dance/theater company David Roussèvre/REALITY he has created thirteen full-length works that have toured throughout the U.S., Europe, and South America; including three critically and popularly successful commissions for BAM's *Next Wave Festival*: collaborations with Sweet Honey in the Rock's Ysaye Barnwell (*Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams*), jazz/hip hop Grammy-nominee Me'Shell NdegeOcello (*The Whispers of Angels*), and Tony-winning lighting designer Beverly Emmons (*Love Songs*). For his choreography of *Love Songs* Roussèvre was awarded a "Bessie" Award.

Roussèvre received a Guggenheim Fellowship to create 2009's *Saudade*, an evening-length work exploring "bittersweet" as that single moment when the greatest of joy and pain are experienced together. The piece toured to major spaces throughout the U.S. (including REALITY's debut at Jacob's Pillow) and received the 2009 LA Horton Awards, for *Best Choreography* and *Best Company Performance*. Roussèvre's other awards include the Cal Arts/Alpert Award in Dance, two Irvine Fellowships, seven consecutive NEA Fellowships, "First Place: Choreography" at the IMZ Int'l Dance Film Festival, and another Horton Award for his evening-length solo *The Year Chat*, which *LA Weekly* called "One of the Ten Best Performance Events of 2001."

David's commissions for other companies include the 2013 piece *Dumbo* (a reimagining of the original, set in a public school) for Cleveland's Dancing Wheels. He has also created works for Ririe-Woodbury; Cleo Parker Robinson; Ballet Hispanico (in collaboration with salsa great Eddie Palmieri); Atlanta Ballet (with a live performance by the 100-member Morehouse College Glee Club); and Houston Ballet (with a live playing of Copland's *Appalachian Spring*). In 2006 Roussèvre spent 7 weeks in Tashkent, Uzbekistan creating *Ecstasy of the Pomegranate* for Ilkhom Theater company.

In 2012 David premiered his third dance film, *Two Seconds After Laughter* which he directed, wrote, co-produced, and co-choreographed. Filmed in Java by Stardust collaborator Cari Ann Shim Sham* and with the support of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts, *Two Seconds...* has screened in India, Mexico, Australia, Egypt, Canada, Italy, Indonesia, Turkey, Spain, and across the US. The film was awarded *Best Experimental Short* at the *New Orleans Film Festival*, *Best Film* at the *San Francisco Dance Film Festival*, and *Best Film* at the *Delta Int'l Film Festival*. It was a finalist for the *Jury Award* at Lincoln Center's *Dance on Camera Festival*, and at Italy's *Souq Film Festival*. David's writing has been published in collections by Bantam Books and Routledge Press and he was twice a screenwriting Fellow in the prestigious Sundance Feature Film Development Lab.

David is Professor of Choreography in UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance, where he served as Chair from 2003-2006. He has also served on the faculties of Princeton University, Bates Dance Festival, Columbia College, Randolph-Macon, and UC Berkeley Extension. From 2004-07 David was the first artist to sit on the Board of Directors of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters.

A dramatic photograph of a man and a woman dancing. The man, with a shaved head and a beard, is in the foreground, holding the woman's legs. The woman is in the background, her body arched back. The lighting is low, creating strong shadows and highlights on their skin.

Stardust

Performance Calendar 2013-14

September 24 - 29, 2013

Avant Premier Performances
Radar LA Festival at Redcat
Theater Los Angeles, CA

January 31-February 1, 2014 (World Premiere)

Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland
College Park, MD

February 6-9, 2014

Peak Performances at Montclair State University
Montclair, NJ

February 11, 2014

Williams Center for the Arts at Lafayette College
Easton, PA

March 21-22, 2014

Contemporary Dance Theater
Cincinnati, OH

May 3, 2014

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Urbana, IL

Summer 2014

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

LOL so much we fall out chair
then LOL on flor. ☺



The Company

Charisse Skye Aguirre is a young choreographer and movement artist that recently graduated from the University of California Los Angeles where she majored in the World Arts and Cultures department with emphasis on dance. She is also a CrossFit Level One Certified Trainer with CrossFit Gymnastics Certification at her family's CrossFit gym, CrossFit Proper. Charisse is also a strength and conditioning coach/trainer at UCLA's John Wooden Center, where she enjoys teaching a variety of fitness courses ranging from CrossFit and Barbell Technique to Dance Conditioning.

Emily Beattie is originally from Fredericksburg, Virginia and currently works as a performer and choreographer in both Boston and Los Angeles. As a performer, Emily has been honored to participate in the works of Stephen Koplowitz, Edisa Weeks, Donald Byrd, Sara Rudner, Jennifer Monson, Simone Forti, Lionel Popkin and several national companies. Since 2003, her own interest in collaborative performance and technology interventions has been supported and performed both nationally and internationally by organizations such as REDCAT, Brown University, Green Street Studios, Somerville Arts Council, Gloucester New Arts Festival, Oberon Theater, World Arts Music/Crash Arts, Support Women Artists Now Day Inc., Kyoto Cultural Festival 2011 Renku Poetry Conference and Festival, and Rhodopi International Theater Lab. Her choreographic work while earning her MFA at UCLA's World Arts and Cultures/ Dance has been supported by the Graduate Opportunity Fellowship, UC Regents Award, the Elaine Krown Klein Fine Arts Scholarship, The Sandra Kaufman Memorial Scholarship, and the Evelyn and Mo Ostin Performing Arts Award. Emily extensively collaborates with composer and designer Eric Gunther who founded the design and performance studio sosolimited.

Leanne Iacovetta moved from Columbus, Ohio to Los Angeles four years ago to attend UCLA. In June 2012, Leanne graduated Magna Cum Laude from UCLA with a Bachelor of Arts in World Arts and Cultures (Dance) and Communication Studies. At UCLA, she co-produced the annual undergraduate showcase, *WACsmash*, and was president of the WAC Undergraduate Society. She has danced for faculty members Lionel Popkin, Vic Marks, and David Rousseve, and performed with hip hop groups such as NSU Modern and Mischief Makers. Leanne also choreographed original pieces for *WACsmash* 2011 and 2012, the WAC Senior Honors Project Showcase, and the UCLA Summer Dance/Theater Intensive. Leanne is currently the Assistant Director for the UCLA Summer Dance/Theater Intensive and teaches dance to youth around Los Angeles.

Jasmine Jawato is a native of Los Angeles and a recent graduate of the department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at UCLA. During her undergraduate studies, Jasmine has had the opportunity to work with Maria Gillespie/Oni Dance, David Rousseve, and Michel Kouakou. She has performed in Los Angeles, at Bates Dance Festival in Maine, in Côte d'Ivoire, Bielefeld, Germany, and at the Joyce Soho in New York.

Nehara Kaley is a choreographer and dance artist dedicated to exploring states of being through interdisciplinary performance. Combining experimental dance-theatre, improvisation, and aerial imagery, she has created and performed works with major support from private foundations, artistic residencies, and public institutions, including the Bogliasco Fellowship and 33 Officina Creativa in Italy, Djerassi Artists Residency, and The Center For Cultural Innovation. She has been a guest artist at many universities including CalArts, UCLA, Cal State LA, and The University of Winchester, U.K. Nehara is a member of the legendary *Rachel Rosenthal Company*, and joined *David Rousseve/REALITY* in 2005. She has performed featured roles with Diavolo Dance Theater throughout the US, was a featured aerialist with Airealistic, and worked with the LA Opera. As co-founder and co-director of *Catch Me Bird*, her company works have been performed in major California and New York venues, supported by The Durfee Foundation, The Flourish Foundation, Cirque Du Soleil, The LA County Arts Commission, and The LA Dept of Cultural Affairs. Supported by The Gerbode Foundation, The Hewlett Foundation, and The Scripps Foundation, Nehara collaborated to create a multisite-specific work for the SF de Young Museum in 2012. She is a Master of Fine Arts in choreography thanks to UCLA.

Michel Kouakou, a native of the Ivory Coast, is an active performer of both traditional and contemporary dance. He has performed throughout Europe, Africa and the United States. As a dancer, he has worked with choreographers such as Germaine Acogny (Senegal), Seydou Boro (Burkina Fasso), Bud Blumenthal (Belgium), Kota Yamazaki (New York/Japan), Jutta Czurda (Germany), Giorgio Rossi (Italy), Reggie Wilson (USA), and Victoria Marks (USA). In 2003, he formed his own company, 'Daara Dance', which has performed in the US, Holland, France, Chad, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, Italy, Israel, and the Czech Republic. Michel has taught throughout Europe, US, and Japan. In 2003 served as a fulltime faculty member at the Duncan Centre Conservatory in Prague. His solo S.A.C.K. was featured in both the New York (2010) and Los Angeles (2011) A.W.A.R.D.S SHOW. Michel is a recipient of the 2007 NYFA Artist Fellowship and is a recent winner of the Vilcelk prize for creative promise.

Nguyễn Nguyễn was born in Vietnam and came to the United States at the age of 7. He was a Regents Scholar at UCLA and graduated with a B.S. in Microbiology and Molecular Genetics. He received his teaching certification as a District Intern and taught biological and chemical science for Los Angeles Unified School District. Nguyễn was a part-time dance instructor at Santa Monica College and Cal State LA. He has worked with various artists in Los Angeles including David Roussève, Cheng-Chieh Yu, Heidi Duckler, Holly Johnston and Maria Gillespie. His own work has been presented at Highways Performance Space, Anatomy Riot, Diavolo Space, Citrus College Dance Festival, "Dancers For Life" at Landis Performing Arts Center, Nate Holden Performing Arts Center, American College Dance Festival and the Guangdong International Dance Festival in China. Nguyễn is a founding member of Los Angeles Movement Arts. He is a MFA candidate for Dance and Choreography at UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance.

Taisha Paggett is a Los Angeles and Chicago-based artist and co-founder of the dance journal project, *itch*. Her work for the stage, gallery and public sphere include individual and collaborative investigations into questions of the body, agency, and the phenomenology of race, and has been presented nationally and abroad, including the Studio Museum in Harlem, Danspace at St Mark's Church, The Off Center in San Francisco, and BAK Basis Voor Actuele Kunst in Utrecht, The Netherlands. *Stardust* is Paggett's third project with David Roussève/REALITY. Additional, she's has had the honor of working extensively with the Stanley Love Performance Group, Fiona Dolenga-Marcotty, Vic Marks, Cid Pearlman, Cheng-Chieh Yu, Baker-Tarpaga Projects, Rebecca Alson-Milkman, Kelly Nipper, Meg Wolfe, Ultra-red, and with Ashley Hunt in their ongoing collaborative project, On Movement, Thought and Politics. Paggett has been a Guest Lecturer at the Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago since 2010 and holds an MFA from UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance.

Kevin Williamson is a dancer, choreographer, and educator. Since graduating from UCLA he has performed for the LA Opera, David Gordon, Julie Taymor, Angelin Preljocaj, Robert Moses, Stephan Koplowitz, Sebastian Prantl, Ryan Heffington, and David Bridel throughout the US, UK, and Europe. Kevin is a member of Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Company and Maria Gillespie's Oni Dance. He is a Lester Horton Award recipient, Bates Education Fellow, and acts as artistic director of his company KDUB DANCE. Kevin has created works for REDCAT, CounterPULSE, Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Company, Loyola Marymount University, American Musical & Dramatic Academy, Los Angeles Movement Arts, The Fringe Festival Scotland, Highways Performance Space, House of Blues, Freud Theatre at UCLA, and Miami's Winter Music Conference. Kevin is an adjunct instructor at American Musical & Dramatic Academy and a teacher at Renaissance High School for the Arts and in UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance.



Collaborators

Cari Ann Shim Sham* (Video Artist)

Cari Ann Shim Sham* is a Los Angeles based filmmaker, choreographer & video artist. With 30+ films and a bakers dozen of awards in her pocket, Cari Ann is also a passionate teacher whose workshops on Dance Film have occurred in Malaysia, Java, San Francisco, UC Riverside and she recently served as the first ever Dance Film Mentor for the SF ODC Pilot 62 Program. Awards include Best Director from the First Glance Film Festival & Best Mini Doc from the St. Louis International Film Festival for her film *SAND* and Best Experimental Short from the New Orleans Film Festival for *Two Seconds After Laughter*; a dance film collaboration with David Rousseve. Her recent experience as one of the editors and associate producer for *One Day on Earth*, the first feature doc filmed in every country of the world on the same day, involved working with over 3,000 hours of footage shot on 10.10.10. ODOE was screened in over 170 countries, the largest premiere ever, including a screening at the UN General Assembly on Earth Day, 2012, winning the Vimeo Social Change Award. Her live work and video art has shown at the Joyce Soho, & Danspace in NYC, Dance Place, DC, REDCAT, Highways Space, the Belagio: Las Vegas, The Brewery, The Henry Huang Theater and Bergamot Station in Los Angeles, and film work namely at the Laemmle Sunset 7, Mann Chinese Theater, and the United Nations General Assembly as well as 60+ festivals internationally. Cari Ann is currently in pre-production on her first feature film, *SHEETS*, touring video art with Lionel Popkin's *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, working on a short dance film *Tumbleweed* with Rachael Lincoln, in her fourth year of curating the Dance Film Showcase for Topanga Film Festival and teaching Dance for Camera adjunct at UCLA. In her spare time she is an avid mushroom hunter, photographer and doorknob collector. www.cariannshimsham.com

d. Sabela grimes (Composer, Sound Designer)

d. Sabela grimes aka Ovasoul7 is a multi-hyphenate artist and educator whose work transforms speech and sound into a visual performance with movement that is electric on transmission. In 1997, Sabela joined Rennie Harris Puremovement (RHPM). During his tenure with RHPM, Sabela served as principal dancer and the company's Education/Outreach Coordinator. He co-wrote the script and composed two songs for RHPM's award winning production *Rome and Jewels*. Since working with RHPM, Sabela has conceived, written, scored, choreographed and presented several dance theater works, *Philly XP*, *World War WhatEver*, and *40 Acres & A Microchip: Salvation or Servitude* from his EXPERIMENT EARTH sound-movement triptych, and *BULLETPROOF DELI* an evening length solo work. Proactively seeking to expand beyond contemporary notions of Hip Hop culture and aesthetics, Sabela's work journeys through the current future of the present past and the corrugated spaces of many incarnations. Each creative offering is a familiar ritual, a conscious spectacle, the stillest rumination. In addition to his own work, Sabela has functioned as composer/sound designer for Victoria Marks' *Medium Big Inefficient Considerably Imbalanced Dance* and is currently composing for Baker & Tarpaga Dance Project's, *Whiteness Revisited*.

Christopher Kuhl (Lighting Designer)

Christopher Kuhl is a lighting, scenic, installation and conceptual designer for new performance, theatre, dance and opera. Recent work includes *ABACUS*. Early Morning Opera (Sundance Film Festival, EMPAC Troy NY); *John Cage Song Books* (SF Symphony, Carnegie Hall), *Under Polaris*. Cloud Eye Control (REDCAT, EXIT Festival Paris, Fusebox Festival Austin); *Watch her not know it now*. Meg Wolfe (REDCAT); *Tov*. Rosanna Gamson. Horton Award. (REDCAT); *There is an Elephant in this Dance*. Lionel Popkin (REDCAT); *Monster*. Pappas and Dancers(UCLA); *The Elephant Room*. Rainpan 43 (Philly Live Arts, Arena Stage, St. Anns Warehouse), *Motherhood Out Loud* (Primary Stages, The Geffen); *How to Completely Disappear*. Ovation Award Nomination (Boston Court Theatre); *The Author, Eclipsed* (Center Theatre Group); *Model Behavior, Monster of Happiness*. Ovation Award Nomination (Theatre Movement Bazaar); *Everyone Who Looks Like You, Uncanny Valley, Undine, My Mind Is Like A Open Meadow*, (Hand2Mouth Theatre), *Into The Dark Unknown* (Holcombe Waller). Lighting Director for Ralph Lemon *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere*; Victoria Marks *Not about Iraq*, David Rousseve *Saudade*. Chris has also had the pleasure of working and making art at REDCAT, On the Boards, The Walker, UCLA Live, BAM, Jacob's Pillow, The Krannert Center, YBCA, Portland Center Stage, Hartford Stage, Dallas Theatre Center, Los Angeles Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Beijing Music Festival, Queer Zagreb, MAC France, Reed Collage, Columbia College and Duke University. Chris is originally from New Mexico and a graduate of CalArts.

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns (dramaturg)

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns is at work on plays-in-progress including Cindy Garcia's *How to Make it to the Dance Floor: A Salsa Guide for Women (Based on Actual Experiences)* and R. Zamora Linmark's *But, Beautiful*. She was a dramaturg for TeAda Productions' *Native Immigrant* and *Global Taxi Drivers*, community-based theatrical creations conceived and written by Leilani Chan. Burns is a consultant for various arts advocacy projects including the Pilipino American Performing Arts Initiative, funded by the Ford Foundation. She works closely with Alleluia Panis and KulArts, Inc, as a member to the San Francisco-based organization's artistic advisory team. Burns began her professional involvement in theater through her work with Roberta Uno, theater director/foundation officer and editor of *Unbroken Thread* and *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color* (with Kathy Perkins). In 2005, Burns joined the Asian American Studies Department at UCLA. Her book, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the United Stages of Empire* is published by NYU Press (2012). She is co-editing a multidisciplinary anthology titled *California Dreaming: Production and Aesthetics in Asian American Art* with Christine Bacareza Balance.

Leah Piehl (Costume Designer)

Leah Piehl has been extremely active in the Los Angeles and New York film, theater and dance communities. This is her second collaboration with David Roussèvre. She recently designed costumes for *The Motherfucker with the Hat*, *Robin Hood* and *The Borrowers* at South Coast Reperatory, *The Second City Christmas Carol* at The Kirk Douglas Theater, and *Intimate Apparel* (LADCC award nominated for best costume design) and *The Heiress* (Ovation award nominated for best costume design) at Pasadena Playhouse. Additional credits include *The Dinosaur Within*, *Futura*, *The Pain and the Itch* and *Tartuffe* (The Theatre at Boston Court), *FULL. STILL HUNGRY.* (Ford Amphitheatre, ContraTiempo), *Moscow*, *Cherry Town* (Long Beach Opera), *The Doctor's Dilemma* and *Eccentricities of a Nightingale* (A Noise Within), *Satyr Atlas* (The Getty Villa), *The Winter's Tale* (Theater 150, Ojai), *Boom* (Furious Theater, Los Angeles), *Paradise Lost* (Intiman Theater, Seattle), *Men of Tortuga* (Furious Theater, Los Angeles), *BobRauschenbergAmerica* and *Tree* (The Theater Inside the Ford, Los Angeles). Leah maintains ongoing collaborations with several choreographers including Contra Tiempo, Kate Hutter, Carmela Herman, Mira Kingsley, Kristen Smiarowski, Rebecca Pappas, and Colin Connor. Leah currently teaches at the University of Southern California. She has her BA in Political Economy of Industrial Societies from the University of California at Berkeley (Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa). She also studied at the University of Padova, Italy. Leah received her MFA in Theater from CalArts in 2006. www.leahpiehl.com

Community Engagement

"Part of my artistic agenda is to create a dialogue with as many communities and audience as possible, both on and off the stage, by using African American culture to speak to universal issues of the heart."

-David Rousseve



Building an informed and involved public audience for contemporary performance is central to the work of David Rousseve and his company. Rousseve has an extraordinary breadth and depth of experience in planning and conducting educational and engagement activities with people of many ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. Among others, Rousseve and the company have worked with the women, at-risk-youth, HIV/AIDS, LGBT, elderly, and African American communities. As Professor of Choreography in the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance (serving as Chair from 2003-2006), he is fully engaged in a global conversation about the role of artists and art in the survival of the human spirit.

With *Stardust* the company is eager to work collaboratively with presenters in designing activities that resonate with the multi-layered, socially-poignant themes of the work, while addressing the needs of local communities. Rousseve has been working with presenters to use *Stardust* to create public dialogues around teen bullying, gay marriage in the African American community, and the relationship between spirituality and queerness.

Among the possibilities for engagement:

- Pre- and post-performance talks about the content and interdisciplinary composition of the work.
- Master classes in modern and postmodern dance.
- Discussions around gay marriage using the "Stardust" protagonist as a jumping off point.
- Lectures or workshops on "Dance For Camera" that include screenings of Rousseve's dance films *Two Seconds After Laughter* and *Bittersweet*.
- Composition workshops led by Rousseve and designed for the experience-level of the participating choreographers.
- Feedback sessions with Rousseve on the work of experienced local choreographers.
- Lectures or workshops by Rousseve on "Creating Socially Engaged Art: Can Dance Change the World?"
- Movement workshops designed for the needs of particular communities (e.g., women, at-risk youth, people with HIV disease, etc).

David Rousseve/REALITY

Touring Engagements 1996-2012

(partial list)

American Center	Paris, France
Contact Theater	Manchester, England
Birmingham Repertory Theater	Birmingham, England
Brooklyn Academy of Music <i>Next Wave Festival</i>	Brooklyn, NY
<i>Carlton Festival</i>	Rio De Janeiro, Brazil
<i>Cal Performances</i> , Zellerbach Hall	Berkeley, CA
Center Stage, North Carolina State	Raleigh, CA
Clarice Smith Center, Univ. of Maryland	College Park, MD
Dance Kaleidoscope	Los Angeles, CA
Dance Umbrella	London, England
Columbia College Dance Center	Chicago, IL
Contemporary Dance Theater	Cincinnati, OH
Danspace Projects, St. Mark's Church	New York, NY
<i>Festival Biennale de la Danse</i>	Lyon, France
Getty Center	Los Angeles, CA
Gammage Hall, Arizona State	Tempe, AZ
Green Room	Manchester, England
Highways Performance Space	Los Angeles, CA
<i>Internationales Sommer Theater Festival</i>	Hamburg, Germany
Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival	Becket, MA
LaMama ETC	New York, NY
Wortham Center, Performing Arts Society	Houston, TX
McCarter Theater	Princeton, NJ
Meaney Hall, Performing Arts Society	Washington, D.C.
<i>Mercado Cultural Festival</i>	Bahia, Brazil
Miami Dade Community College	Miami, Florida
Newcastle Playhouse	Newcastle, England
Nia African/Caribbean Center	Manchester, England
On the Boards	Seattle Washington
Peak Performances, Montclair State Univ.	Montclair, NJ
The Kitchen	New York, NY
UT Austin, Performing Arts Center	Austin, TX
Performing Arts Chicago	Chicago, IL
Performing Arts Society, San Francisco	San Francisco, CA
P.S. 122	New York, NY
<i>Serious Fun Festival</i> , Lincoln Center	New York, NY
Scottsdale Center for the Arts	Scottsdale, AZ
South Bank Center, Queen Elizabeth Hall	London, England
UC Riverside Presents	Riverside, CA
University of Pennsylvania	State College, PA
UCLA Live, Royce Hall	Los Angeles, CA
UA Presents, University of Arizona	Tucson, AZ
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts	San Francisco, CA
Yorkshire Playhouse	Leeds, England
Walker Art Center	Minneapolis, MN

Los Angeles Times

Dance review: David Rousseve's 'Stardust' a revelation at REDCAT

By Victoria Looseleaf

September 25, 2013, 12:57 p.m.



The most startling – and stunning – moment in David Roussèv's latest dance-theater hybrid, "Stardust," came an hour into the 80-minute intermissionless piece, which premiered Tuesday at REDCAT.

The 53-year-old choreographer appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, to perform a heartwrenching solo set to Johnny Mathis crooning the Bach/Gounod "Ave Maria."

With his jerking, swooping arms and quasi-angelic face, Roussèv, bathed in Christopher Kuhl's amber light, and bending and dipping as if the world's weight were on his shoulders, was spellbinding.

Rooted to the floor, he made every gesture a plea, a struggle and a fervent quest for love and acceptance, as video projections – a series of unanswered text messages written by an unseen African American gay teen ("I try b gangsta," "Plz help me") – described a terrifying molestation.

Crouching, then crumpling to the floor, Roussèv slid off the stage, painstakingly pushing himself backwards, not to be seen again – in the flesh, that is. His Skype video appearances as "Granpa," appearing throughout the work, also proved him a skilled thespian.

A storyteller for the 21st century, Roussèv gave his 10-member company, Reality, much to say through his distinct movement vocabulary, a jazz/hip-hop/neo-pedestrian fusion and the stream of tweets – poignant, witty, earnest – a revelation of the soul. The performance was part of Radar L.A., the citywide theater festival featuring 18 productions.

Fierce performers all, this troupe of self-described "ghetto angels" often navigated the stage in unison, their defiant marching/stomping a recurring motif. Roussèv's canny use of music – from an array of Nat King Cole numbers, including "Mona Lisa" and Hoagy Carmichael's iconic, "Stardust," to d. Sabela grimes' original electronic score and sound design – enhanced each dancer's moves.

Kevin Williamson, a study in fluid lyricism, was also commanding, with crisp turns and effortless jumps, his partnering infused with a melting longing. Taisha Paggett, when not giving attitude, was a master of expansive emotions, her outstretched arms and one-legged balancing the embodiment of grace. Nehara Kalev and Nguyen Nguyêñ, also vessels of authenticity, found depth in a cocked head, breezy smile or high kick. Kevin Le's hip-hop solo, both smooth and jagged, featured a kind of faux locking that added punch to Roussèv's singular vision.

Giving hope to the invisible teen was his grandfather's video-dispensed wisdom, his love of "Vincen van gos," and being a "romantix," as filtered through those '50s and '60s ballads. Cari Ann Shim Sham's video art, including lush imagery of a night sky, a bird taking flight and a disco ball's starburst patterns, never overpowered, but added dreaminess to the dancers' full-throttle engagement.

From the work's opening text messages – "Sup," "I want a BFF" – to the final verb/noun, "Cry" (dramaturgy by Lucy Burns), "Stardust" delivers a transcendent coming-of-age tale of universality, aspiration and identity. #Plz go.

The New York Times

Adversity, Relayed in Emoticons by a Troubled Gay Teenager

In ‘Stardust,’ a Vortex Depicted via Text and Skype

By SIOBHAN BURKE FEB. 7, 2014



Stardust with, from left, Charisse Skye Aguirre, Kevin Williamson and Michel Kouakou at Montclair State. Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

company, from Los Angeles, Reality, sway through a gentle opening phrase. “I don’t know u. But I text u my biggest secrets. Plz read, k?”

Junior faces a lot of adversity, its severity only intensified by the tossed-off medium of vowel-less words and emoticons: the death of his grandfather, who is his closest and perhaps only friend; rape by his foster dad; getting beat up by the boy he likes; and most pervasively, wondering if he is worthy of being loved, by others and by God. (“Stardust” has a strong biblical undercurrent.)

His life is not devoid of joy, which he finds in the music of Nat King Cole, in van Gogh’s “Starry Night,” in a digital hamster he acquires when his school therapist, Miss Thelma, prescribes a pet for his emotional well-being. He wants to be able to fly — like the pigeons, or “ghetto angels,” in his neighborhood — and to cry. By the end, for better or worse, he has managed to do both.

If it sounds unnuanced, bordering dangerously on a caricature of inner-city hardship, that’s because it is. Mr. Roussèvre wants so badly, it seems, for us to feel for this character — to really see this person, despite his absence — that he comes on far too strong, making it difficult to feel anything at all.

Mr. Roussèvre’s lush, circular movement physicalizes the sparring dimensions of Junior’s psyche. At any point, any one of his appealing dancers could be our protagonist. (So could Mr. Roussèvre, who dances briefly, a master of his own voluminous choreography.) They course between extremes of acting tough (thrusting out their chests, grabbing their crotches) and softening; a hand fluttering over the heart appears repeatedly. Emily Beattie and Taisha Paggett (whose elegant solo, later, is a highlight) come face-to-face in a combination of screaming match and laughing fit. Love songs by Cole, Johnny Mathis and Ella Fitzgerald alternate with D. Sabela Grimes’s bass-heavy score.

The program notes for “Stardust” describe it as “a coming-of-age story for the Twitter generation.” More often, it seems like a coming-of-age story for a generation trying to understand the Twitter generation. There is something decidedly retro, a little bit high-school-play, about a mock iPhone trundling onstage for a simulated Skype conversation. (Junior’s inspirational creaky-voiced grandpa, who urges, “You got to believe who you are inside, boy!,” is on the other end of the line.)

But “Stardust,” evidently, is not incapable of casting a spell. Exiting the theater, I overheard two young men from the audience saying that they almost cried.

“Stardust” runs through Sunday at the Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University in New Jersey; peakperfs.org.

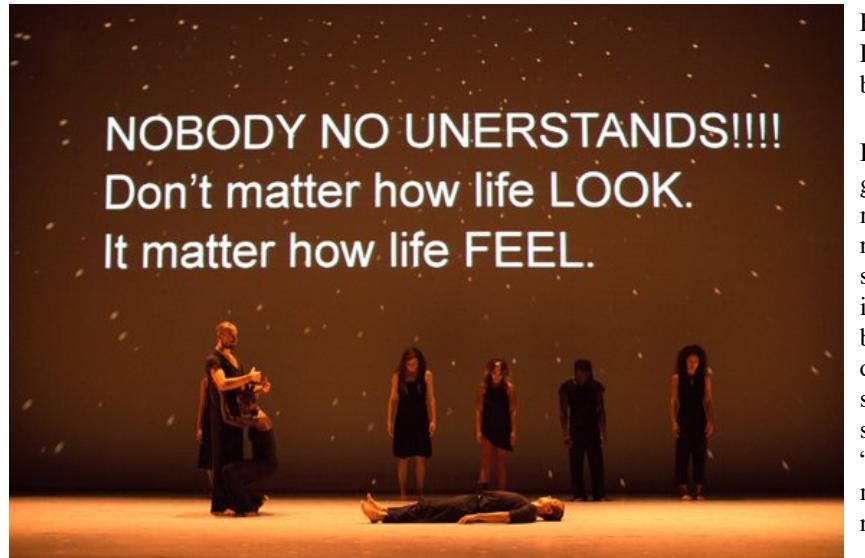
MONTCLAIR, N.J. — The first thing to know about David Roussèvre’s “Stardust” is that you never actually see its protagonist, a black gay urban teenager named Junior. The voice at the heart of this 80-minute dance-theater piece, which had its regional premiere on Thursday in Montclair State University’s Peak Performances series, speaks to us via text messages, projected on the back wall of the theater.

“Dear person who b at this #: Sup?” Junior writes by way of introduction, as the 10 distinctive dancers of Mr. Roussèvre’s

NEW YORK Amsterdam News

DAVID ROUSSEVE/REALITY: A BITTERSWEET RETURN

Charmaine Patricia Warren, 2/20/2014



From the start, the 10-member cast in David Rousseve's "Stardust" is breathtaking.

Breathlessly still, they fill the stage, gazing at the audience until finally they move as one (a knee buckles, an elbow rights their bodies back to standing or soft double-breaths trigger more impulse movement) while the screen behind them delivers text-speak. One dancer, Taisha Paggett, facing the screen, makes markings in the air as if she is writing the text. One text reads: "Dear secretconfessions.com, I writes my biggest secret just for you. Please read, K?"

Another follows: "I want a BFF sooooooo bad!!!!!! Somebody who understand how I feels an give me love."

We soon learn that the words are from Junior, the invisible protagonist who is desperately trying to find someone to hold his hand and give him love. The dancer's slow-moving, joint-driven meditation would return here and there, punctuating the work.

"Stardust" is emotionally draining yet powerfully captivating, and as such, it takes the audience on a bumpy ride from acknowledgement, with Junior accepting that he is gay; to the humorous, with a fierce voguing duet that drew howls from the audience; to the sublime, as Kevin Williamson holds his arms in what seems like a never-ending embrace, as one-by-one the other nine dancers try to fit into his arms but inevitably slip onto the floor on their backs, crawling away on their elbows but returning to his embrace again and again.

One hour into the story, Rousseve appears—sadly, for only two and a half minutes—with a gesture-driven solo, one hand to chest, the other reaching high, matched with pleading gasps and rippling joints, cementing the bittersweet story. The takeaway is rough. Junior pleads for help to find love because as a young, African-American gay boy, he is marginalized, and conversations through technology become his only respite.

Rousseve admits that this was not an autobiography, nor is it meant to offer any political or religious position, but the work is peppered with the reality that surrounds these thoughts. The young Junior, for example, ends up in foster care because he has no family and is molested. He speaks using only Ebonics because that is what he knows, and one of his sole confidantes is his dead grandfather, who communicates with him through Skype. This, Rousseve wanted us to know, is the real deal.

Toward the end, Junior writes, "Dear God: I like 2 ask you questions even if you no answers.

"You dope ;-)"

Kudos to video artist Cari Ann Shim Sham for her perfectly timed images and to D. Sabela Grimes for his original hip-hop-based music. The cast of REALITY must also be mentioned: Charisse Skye Aguirre, Emily Beattie, Leanne Lacovetta, Jasmine Jawato, Nehara Kalev, Michael Kouakou, Kevin Le and Nguyen Nguyen.



Los Angeles Dance Review: STARDUST (David Rousséve / REALITY at REDCAT)

by Tony Frankel on September 25, 2013 in Theater-Los Angeles

STARRY STARRY NIGHT

David Rousséve's full-length dance piece that opened at REDCAT last night is something of a miracle. Choreographed, written, and directed by Rousséve, *Stardust* effectively amalgamates so many elements of multi-disciplinary performing arts—theater, story, dance, multi-media—that it should be a template for any dance company that desires to move, touch and inspire their audience.

It begins with a narrative. An African American gay urban teenager struggles to find a way to express himself amongst the turmoil of inner-city life. He is clearly a sensitive soul trapped in the body of a societal misfit. As much as he wants to love and embrace his fellow man, he finds himself becoming as much of a bully as those who beat him up in the school hallways. He asks God why He made him a faggot, black and a "dumb-ass." Even with two loving supporters—his grandfather and a school therapist—the unnamed protagonist consistently finds himself at odds with his brutal reality.

Yet for all of the empathy we have for this troubled adolescent, we never see him on stage. This coming of age tale is told via his unanswered emotional tweets and text messages sent to a receiver he doesn't know. In his search for God, the "innernet" is his connection to the universe. Rarely has any dance piece—or play for that matter—so efficiently commented on the paradox of communication in the electronic age: For all of the tools we have to connect, we are more disconnected than ever.

The texted dialogue projected on the back wall is insightful, authentic, poignant and surprisingly humorous (terrific dramaturgical work by Lucy Burns). When the therapist recommends that the teen get a pet, he downloads an app of a hamster, texting that he must be careful when snuggling his new pet as there is a crack in the glass of his old iPhone. The Alice Walker-like texts ("feel good her call me child") are infectious. I simply cannot remember a time when I felt so connected to a character that I never see. Plus, by chronicling the journey of this despairing but eternally hopeful student, *Stardust* will no doubt foster a much-needed public conversation on teen-bullying, at-risk youth, promiscuity versus the need to love and be loved, and the correlation between gayness, spirituality and religion.

The boy also uses art as a portal for discovering God. On a museum trip, he abhors the naturalism of Rembrandt but comprehends the impressionism of Van Gogh. His grandfather's recordings of Nat King Cole feed his imagination, and while songs such as "Nature Boy" perfectly elucidate the boy's state of mind, sound designer d. Sabela grimes' hip-hop-infused original compositions add a layer of danger and anger so prevalent in inner-city life.

Movement is as crucial to this work as the monologue. Working with REALITY, his 10-member, multiethnic, transnational L.A.-based company, Rousséve incorporates a series of fervid and emotional jazz-infused dance pieces that highlight the boy's sporadic experiences. As modern dance goes, his movement vocabulary is truly accessible because it is used to tell a story. Whether as solos, duets or a unified ensemble, this isn't just dance for the sake of dance, it intensifies the narrative. The artists, all of whom master ballet, jazz and modern dance, are Charisse Skye Aguirre, Emily Beattie, Leanne Iacovetta, Jasmine Jawato, Nehara Kaley, Michel Kouakou, Kevin Le, Nguyen Nguyén, Taisha Paggett and Kevin Williamson. Rousséve, who normally makes a bigger appearance in his works, appears for a brief period, but it is an impressive cameo.

The only misstep occurs when a video monitor displays the boy's grandfather as he communicates via Skype in the boy's dreams. Rousséve plays the grandfather and, clearly made-up to be older, his folksy interpretation of the character rings false. This may have been intentional as a way of exhibiting the old man through a dream, but within such a flawless show, the result is jarring.

This illuminative, captivating and surreal work may be rife with modern references—the older generation may be stymied by symbols such as <3 and :-(in the texts—but the themes are timeless. After a gorgeous pas de trois is executed in front of Cari Ann Shim Sham's video of a shimmering star-pocked sky while Cole croons "When I Fall in Love," you may be inspired to shut off your mobile devices in the future and hug someone instead.

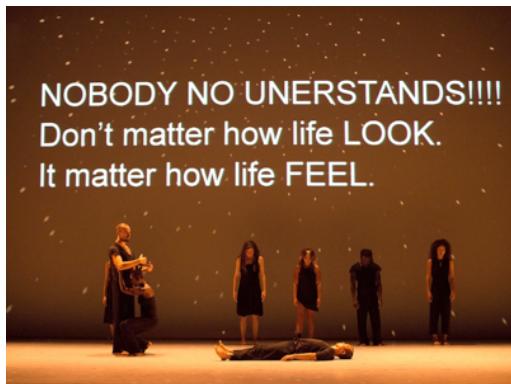
See more at: <http://www.stageandcinema.com/2013/09/25/stardust-rousseve-reality-redcat/#sthash.5i3aPITd.dpuf>

LEHIGH VALLEY
DANCE EXCHANGE
LVDE

David Roussèv-REALITY

Stardust

Tuesday, February 11, 2014
Williams Center for the Arts
By Sarah Carlson



Every once and a while a show comes along that is so well timed, so exquisitely crafted, and so masterfully delivered that there is only awe in its wake. David Roussèv has been telling stories with his multi-media production company REALITY for over 20 years and his persistence has paid off. His searingly poignant "Stardust" performed at The Williams Center this past Tuesday night provided salient commentary on the progress and pitfalls of life in the 21st century.

Roussèv's productions are multi-layered and often blend linear narrative with dance, video and music. Here, the story arc is driven by a series of tweets by a black teenage homosexual struggling to find love. The tweets are projected on a screen above and behind the dancing. Abbreviations and gangsta street lingo make for comical moments but also serve to situate the character.

Although we never learn his name, his tweets are clearly directed towards "us"—whom he's found by simply sending his tweets to a random, unknown # - or as he quips, "off into internet land". Meanwhile, a chorus of dancers faces the audience engaging in gestures and body language that illustrate the emotion behind the tweets.

The direct nature of this structure creates an immediate bond between the main character & the audience. The tweets reveal a boy struggling with identity and yearning for love and acceptance in a harsh, violent world. Very quickly, Roussèv transforms the tweet from a superficial forum for quick chatter to a medium for profound self-revelation. Initially, the movement is minimal and the marriage between projected text & live dance is the best I've seen.

Once the dancing becomes more intricate, it becomes somewhat harder to absorb the drama of both the tweets and the onstage movement.



Meanwhile, Roussèv's multi-racial cast can be seen moving with a grounded yet romantic flow. Hands pound on hearts and heads arch backward as if beseeching the heavens. The chorus appears alternately as a collective of individuals and the collective unconscious. At one point, one woman approaches another as if to share a secret, then (unexpectedly) utters an ear-piercing scream. The other woman shares the audience's shock initially, only to be drawn into an exchange of screams that are blood curdling. They appear to scream into one another's mouths, as if passing on or drawing out the very essence of desperation. The moment is thoroughly chilling.

Just when reading the tweets becomes a bit tiresome, the voice of Nat King Cole sweeps in with his classic recording of "When I Fall in Love". The dreamy instrumentation and rich tenor of King Cole's voice are a stark contrast to the harsh world of the tweeter. Several of Cole's recordings pepper the action, each song meticulously woven into the fabric of the storyline. The lyrics of his songs have never been so refreshing and yet so rife with irony.

Unloved and marginalized, the main character's suffering gets under our skin and moves us. We can't help but share in his joys and sorrows and in the process reflect on the limits of tolerance around us. Roussèv's use of social media as the medium for his story telling is brilliant and captures the malaise of many 21st century youth. While technology has provided instantaneous connection, in some ways we are more alone than ever. Despite its heart-wrenching tone, "Stardust" manages to end with a ray of hope for a future where dreams can still come true.



DanceBeat

an **artsJOURNAL** blog

Flying with Broken Wings

February 13, 2014 by Deborah Jowitt, Photos by: Yi-Chun Wu
David Roussèvre/REALITY appears at Peak Performances, February 6-9.

“Miss Thelma god no love me
but he let me feel him in my heart.
That mean god a mean MOFO.”



his idol rapes him in a dark alley. For once, he stands up to his attacker. A brick is thrown. He dies.

But this is not a news item that it hurts you to read. It's a dance drama called *Stardust* that David Roussèvre made for his Los Angeles-based company, David Roussèvre/REALITY. As in his *Saudade*, seen here in 2009 (also presented by Montclair State University's Peak Performances), the specific actions in *Stardust*'s plot are dislocated and transformed.

This time, the choreographer has used two very up-to-date devices both to distance and intensify the tragedy. His teen-aged protagonist never appears on the stage of the Alexander Kasser Theater; his thoughts form on the cyclorama in big white letters. His longing for friends, his love of velvety old Nat King Cole songs, his tender feelings toward his digital wind-up hamster, his excitement over Van Gogh's “The Starry Night” (seen on a class museum trip), his hope that a benign God is looking after him, his pain, and his loneliness—all these are relayed by text messages he hopes someone will read. Is God checking his e-mail?

The projected words are interspersed with Cari Ann Shim Sham's Disney-sweet projections of huge butterflies, clouds, mountains, and the starry skies that Junior would like to fly into. “Nobody my facebook friend,” he writes, but “I no can never cry.” His lonely misspellings and brave twitterspeak are both comical and heartbreaking. But he does, a couple of times,

receive messages from his grandfather via Skype (or “Skite,” as the old man calls it). Each time, a giant, homemade-looking mock-up of an iPhone is wheeled onstage in a momentary dimming of Christopher Kuhl's lighting; on it appears Roussèvre's face. Wherever he is, the reception is poor. Looking weather-beaten and speaking in a crackly voice, he lectures Junior lovingly about being strong and good and trustful of God.

You know from the outset where this will get the boy, just as you know what is going to happen when he walks happily out of the restaurant with the big fellow he's so honored to be with. No surprises in this story.



The people we *do* see onstage dance. And their dancing reflects various changes in Junior's moods and desires. As does the music. King Cole singing "Nature Boy" and other songs bespeak the boy's essential sweetness, while d. Sabela grimes's music and sound design conjure up the urban neighborhood's violence and raucous games. In the beginning, the ten dancers (seven of them past or present students in UCLA's World Arts and Cultures department, where Roussèvre is a professor) are spread out across the stage, making quiet, unison gestures that expand gradually in scale and travel out into space.

Some of the dancing that happens as the story begins to unroll puzzles me. Roussèvre means it, I assume, to reflect the buoyant, optimistic aspect of Junior's thinking, but it looks generic—big swirling turns and springs into the air and drops to the floor create a homogenous texture; nothing looks as gently quirky and jolting as Junior's mind. However, as *Stardust* goes on, the movement becomes tougher or more playful or more affectionate, as well as rhythmically interesting—relevant to the neighborhood as well as to the protagonist's state of mind. Familiar gestures are worked up into motifs: performers grab their crotches, inflate their chests, and spread their arms ("you talkin' to me?" or "don't look at me!").



Emily Beattie whispers something to Taisha Paggett, and it starts them giggling and shrieking with laughter out of all proportion to what may have been said. Paggett and Beattie, plus Nguyễn Nguyễn and Nehara Kalev dance, while others watch. Clarisse Skye Aguirre, Leanne Iacovetta, and Kevin Le imitate one another's steps. Aguirre, Kevin Williamson, and Michel Kouakou bolt into the foreground, while seven others form a chain behind them, making slow, mournful gestures. Jasmine Jawato takes on Kouakou. At times, they are the friends Junior would like them to be. A rainbow assemblage. Ghetto angels.

Roussèvre himself appears onstage unexpectedly, standing in one spot to perform a meditation tinged with anguish—his arms fondling and pushing away air, his torso sinuous. Some time after that, Junior writes, "My grandpa dies." Johnny Mathis sings "Ave Maria."

Beattie and Aguirre, for instance, in tumultuous solitary outbursts. Near the end Paggett dances through a cluster of data: projected text recounting the rape; Grandpa's voice exhorting, "Junior, hear me in your dreams!" Ella Fitzgerald singing, "Reach for tomorrow; today belongs to the past;" and the Beatitudes from the Bible's Book of Matthew ("Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God. . . .") Her beautifully nuanced performance anchors them all.



Roussèvre treads a very fine line in *Stardust* between gritty tragedy and fairytale pathos—never quite falling one way or soaring another. Like the fictional life it honors.

FALL ARTS: DANCE



Photographs by ANNE CUSACK Los Angeles Times

CHOREOGRAPHER David Rousseve, whose Reality troupe will perform at Radar L.A., is known for his dance-theater hybrids. Here he's with dancer Taisha Paggett.

Spreading 'Stardust'

David Rousseve offers a coming-of-age tale, complete with text messages

BY SUSAN JOSEPH

As a child growing up in Houston, David Rousseve spent most of his Sundays attending an African American Roman Catholic church. Though determined to be a model altar boy, he questioned the definition of sin.

"I certainly wasn't in touch then with my own sexuality," says the now 53-year-old choreographer, who came out as a gay man in his mid-20s to his family. "But I knew for a fact there were people in that congregation who were having sex and who weren't married, and it didn't seem right that all these people were going to hell."

Decades later, Rousseve says he felt "like a child again sitting in my church" after Congress passed the

Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, which allowed states the right not to recognize same-sex marriage and which the Supreme Court overturned in June.

"For me, DOMA was basically saying you can't get married because you are not a child of God," he says.

So the choreographer, who first rose to prominence in the 1990s for his autobiographical, politically driven dance-theater hybrids, decided to create his own child of God.

He's an ostracized, gay black teenager of the 21st century and the invisible yet highly expressive main character of "Stardust," Roussève's latest and arguably most personal and complex work to date. One of 18 productions that will be presented next week at Radar L.A., the citywide theater festival now in its second edition, "Stardust" juxtaposes a virtuosic jazz and hip-hop-influenced movement vocabulary with the teen's coming-of-age story that's communicated entirely through video projected text messages.

Performed by the choreographer's 10-member company Reality and set to a musical soundscape of Nat King Cole songs and original hip-hop-based compositions by d. Sabela grimes, the multilayered narrative revolves around a tormented boy who seeks secret redemption from outside forces, including his grandfather's love, the music of Cole and the paintings of Van Gogh. The dancers, with their emotionally charged movement, seek to capture the boy's alternating states of despair, anger, hope and romantic yearning as a unified ensemble and in a series of duets and solos.

And though not directly autobiographical, the dance is also Roussève's response "to this idea that I don't belong to God, and it captures the truth of my childhood more than pieces that were about the facts of my childhood," he says.

Scheduled to receive its official world premiere in January at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland, "Stardust" will embark on a national tour through 2015, including a stint next summer at the Jacob's Pillow festival in Massachusetts. Radar L.A. audiences will be the first to see it as a finished work, Sept. 24 to 29.

Presented by REDCAT in association with Center Theatre Group, Radar L.A. has selected local and international artists this year whose works highlight the interdisciplinary nature that defines much of cutting-edge contemporary performance. Including Roussève's company in this lineup made perfect sense, says Mark Murphy, REDCAT's executive director and one of the festival's chief curators.

"This increasing interdisciplinary approach has become essential to finding new forms of expression, and David is someone who has existed both in the worlds of dance and theater since the beginning of his career," says Murphy. "He is a master storyteller who's always used a combination of movement, text and images to evoke very powerful themes and



KEVIN WILLIAMSON, right, at a rehearsal of "Stardust," which features Nat King Cole songs and hip-hop-based compositions by d. Sabela grimes.

emotions."

Sitting in his office for a recent pre-rehearsal interview at UCLA, where he's a choreography professor, Roussève displays both a sharp sense of humor and an unmitigated sincerity when discussing his work.

The inspiration for "Stardust," he says, came from a desire to explore the relationship between technology and intimacy after years of observing his students' inability to disconnect from their mobile devices. "Then one time I was out of town, and I was texting my partner, and I found the experience to be more intimate than talking. And I thought, 'This is a complicated thing.'"

But once Roussève started developing a movement vocabulary for the piece, he found himself mining his own childhood experiences and realized that what he wanted to create had deeper, more spiritual dimensions.

"This was my time to make a loving, compassionate statement about a boy being dehumanized by his community and about his absolute need to find some shred of humanity in a world that seems hopeless," he says.

Roussève spent about three years crafting the work, collaborating with members of his company and experimenting with new material in a class he created at UCLA for students to gain professional-level experience working with faculty and visiting choreographers.

"I have a different perception of what time does to choreography from working with David," says Kevin Williamson, a 31-year-old member of Roussève's company and a master of fine arts student at UCLA. "David allows time to hone his process,

and this piece may have been three years in the making, but it's been 50 years in his psyche."

For Roussève, the process allowed him to rediscover his passion for the "kick-ass dancing" and the jazz-inflected, Bob Fosse-style choreography that he studied in his youth, in addition to mastering the medium of text messaging to reveal the heart and soul of his invisible teenager.

"I had first tried to do this in tweets, but I couldn't get the messages down to 140 characters," he says, laughing. "But with texting, I found there was something about being restricted in this medium that really brought out the directness of my writing."

While the text marks a departure for Roussève as it's projected rather than spoken by himself or his dancers, "the journey you go on in his work remains the same," says Taisha Paggett, a 36-year-old dancer who has collaborated with Roussève for the past decade.

"In all his works, David has cycled through these different personalities and voices, but it's always his voice. He really puts himself into his characters, and the results are always deeply emotional, with as much joy as there is pain."

Personally, Roussève feels "more moved by this piece than any other piece I've ever made. I hope it translates for the audience," he says, noting his biggest phobia lies in people finding the work unabashedly religious and "saying, 'Oh, he's going back to his Catholic roots.' But what I'm really doing is confronting those roots. This idea that God doesn't approve of who I am? That's been my driving force."

D12 FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2014 // THE ENQUIRER

ENTER ROUSSEVE'S WORLD

By David Lyman

Enquirer contributor

David Roussèvre doesn't mind admitting it. He's 54, old enough to remember a time when communicating meant talking to someone face-to-face. Or writing a letter. Or possibly even making a phone call. Not on a mobile phone. We're talking rotary dials here.

The disconnect between that era – "slow communication," let's call it – and the lickety-split communication-lite era we live in today is what provided the initial nudge for him to create "Stardust," the 85-minute work his Los Angeles-based dance/theater company will perform at the Aronoff Center on Friday and Saturday.

"We took three years to develop it," Roussèvre said, speaking by phone from his office at UCLA, where he is a professor of choreography in the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance. Now that the piece is fully formed, his company will tour it much of this year and next.

Roussèvre's website says the piece "explores the evolving nature of intimacy in our technology-driven, furiously-paced world."

But what really makes "Stardust" such an intriguing and visually sumptuous work is its multidisciplinary nature. For one thing, the music roams all over the spectrum, from hip-hop to Nat King Cole standards. The stage is dominated by massive projected images.



Contemporary Dance Theater's Guest Artist Series brings in "Stardust" by David Roussèvre this weekend.

PROVIDED/
VALERIE OLIVEIRO

And then there is Roussèvre's choreography itself. It's jazzy. But it's informed by a career inspired by the likes of modern dance masters like Twyla Tharp and Martha Graham and Pina Bausch.

"And there was ballet," says Roussèvre. "When I was starting out, so many modern dancers studied ballet with Alfredo Corvino, I decided that I needed to do that, too."

Corvino was renowned for his attentive and meticulous teaching. But for Roussèvre, Corvino also provided a link to the world of German Expressionism, where dance, theater, music and the visual arts blended in a

way that delivered works with profound dramatic impact.

It proved to be something that Roussèvre had been searching for, even though he probably couldn't articulate it at the time.

Raised in Houston, he went to Princeton University to study pre-law.

"I had always loved theater and dance, but I wasn't convinced that I could find the intellectual satisfaction with them that I knew I needed," he says. "I was committed to doing something positive for the world, but I didn't know how I could do that with dance."

IF YOU GO

What: "Stardust," by David Roussèvre

When: 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday

Where: Jarson-Kaplan Theatre, Aronoff Center, 650 Walnut St., Downtown

Tickets: \$22-\$32

Information: 513-621-2787,
www.cincinnatiarts.org

At Princeton, he discovered modern dance.

"It completely changed my understanding of dance," says Roussèvre. "I discovered it was possible to make work that was socially driven or humanistic, dance that had commentary."

Even more important, he discovered how to make dance that was both entertaining and had something important to say.

"That was it," says Roussèvre. "That was when the world exploded for me."

Nearby New York City was in the midst of a huge dance boom, much of it from independent-minded modern dance choreographers.

"The very next year, I saw Pina Bausch's 'Bluebeard' at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. That was the cat's pajamas. Theater and dance and opera and wit and charm. And cutting-edge experimentalism. It had everything I wanted to do. I've never looked back." ■

METROWEEKLY

Rousseve's Reality:

UCLA's dance diva brings his own brand of Stardust to College Park

By Doug Rule, Published on January 23, 2014

As a child growing up in Houston, David Rousseve had dreams of being a Broadway triple-threat performer -- singer, dancer and actor. Surprisingly, that was his principal motivation when choosing college too.

"Honestly, I'd never heard of Princeton when I got in," Rousseve says, laughing at the memory. "But I looked at a map and saw, well, New Jersey is next to New York. I can commute to New York and become a Broadway diva. That was my goal in life."



(Photo by Valerie Oliveiro)

Broadway quickly lost its luster for Rousseve, who gravitated to studying modern dance at Princeton -- along with political science and African studies -- all while further engaging in the experimental theater and dance communities in New York.

These days Rousseve lives in Los Angeles and teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles, when not creating dance theater pieces with his 10-member company Reality. Next weekend the Clarice Smith Center at the University of Maryland presents the world premiere of *Stardust*. He choreographed, wrote and directed this piece exploring the broad concept of "the evolving nature of intimacy and technology. ... What it means to have relationships without a whole lot of human contact."

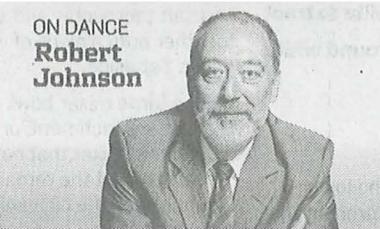
Rousseve's multimedia piece incorporates dance, screen designs, music from classic jazz to original contemporary hip-hop, and projected video and images -- specifically, tweets and texts that come from a poor, African-American gay adolescent, partly modeled on himself. "It's a projection to my own adolescence."

[David Rousseve/Reality](#) perform *Stardust* Friday, Jan. 31, and Saturday, Feb. 1, at 8 p.m. 'Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center's Ina and Jack Kay Theatre, University of Maryland, University Boulevard and Stadium Drive, College Park. Tickets are \$35. Call 301-405-ARTS or visit claricesmithcenter.umd.edu.

The Star-Ledger

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2014

Dance inspired by texting may get you talking



ON DANCE
Robert
Johnson

David Roussèvre admits he was annoyed. The choreographer of "Stardust," which his REALITY company brings to Montclair State University tomorrow through Sunday, doubles as a teacher in World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, where, he says, he couldn't get his students to put down their iPhones.

Roussèvre, 54, is Old School enough to have been taught to shake hands and look people in the eye. As a dance-maker, his work depends upon an intimacy that's only possible when living, breathing individuals share the same physical space. To him, the new social media seemed like a barrier to genuine communication, and the sight of young people continually thumbing text messages grated on his nerves.

"What does that say, when you can't put your technology down?" Roussèvre says he asked himself. "And what does it say when that's how you primarily know people?"

As he worked on "Stardust," however, Roussèvre says his feelings began to change. The hard-hitting dance theater piece, which began as a riposte to the habits of the digital age, evolved into something far more ambitious. Roussèvre says he found himself texting his partner as he traveled, and the contact was



JORGE VISMARA

David Roussèvre's REALITY company performs his "Stardust," about an ostracized teen, in Montclair tomorrow through Sunday.

meaningful. Then, as he shaped "Stardust's" central character — a black, gay teen named Junior who sends distress signals to the outside world in the form of text messages — Roussèvre began to recall his own difficult coming-of-age in Houston.

"The emotional through-lines are 100 percent personal," he says. "We all know and hope that this is changing radically, but there are still a lot of gay teens, and particularly teens of color, who feel ostracized from their communities of color because they're queer. I certainly did when I was growing up."

Today's national debate over gay marriage reminded Roussèvre of

the role the church has played in promoting prejudice.

"There's no affront to me greater than saying you're so worthless that even God doesn't love you," he says. "So that became the impassioned dialogue at the core of the piece."

Daringly, Roussèvre decided that he would make the protagonist of "Stardust" both literally and symbolically invisible. The audience never sees him, and only learns his story through the desperately lonely texts that appear onscreen, along with occasional Skype calls from Junior's grandfather and animations by Cari Ann Shim Sham visualizing Junior's fantasies.

Stardust

Where: Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair

When: Tomorrow at 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m.

How much: \$20; call (973) 655-5112 or visit peakperfs.org.

Ten dancers compensate for Junior's absence, symbolizing the community he yearns for and lending him their bodies, to give "Stardust" its emotional wallop. They're a diverse, multi-generational group that can make Junior's story universal. "With all different colors, gay and straight, all jumping in and out of celebrating this marginalized and invisible character," Roussèvre says, "it transcends the boundary of his identity."

Despite the lyricism of Nat King Cole's "When I Fall in Love," a favorite of Junior's grandfather, and despite the drive of original music by d. Sabela grimes, whose urban funk occasions "some gorgeous, up-tempo dancing," Roussèvre says "Stardust's" resolution is bitter-sweet, combining exhilaration, joy and tragedy.

"I'm into the challenge of a nuanced and provocative ending," Roussèvre says. He hopes the piece will spark debate as audience members ask, "Did it need to end that way?"

*Robert Johnson:
rjohnson76@nyc.rr.com*

LA STAGE TIMES

Roussèvre and grimes Reach for the *Stardust* at REDCAT

by Jessica Koslow | September 23, 2013

David Roussèvre is in a particularly good mood, sitting in his office in UCLA's Glorya Kaufman Hall about 10 days before his latest work, *Stardust*, has its very first viewing at REDCAT as part of the Radar L.A. festival. Or maybe he always begins his sentences with a joyful burst of laughter.

The 53-year-old, Alpert Award-winning director-choreographer is speaking about d. Sabela grimes, who not only composed original music but also crafted an ongoing layer of sound design for the entire work. "He's one of my favorite people on the planet," Roussèvre says. "He's so talented, and what a nice and incredibly evolved guy."

"This is a really heady piece in its own way," says Roussèvre. "I'm trying to conduct a social and intellectual conversation, but also it's meant to communicate with you on the level of the heart. Sabela takes in both of those dialogues...It's very hard to describe what he does. It's so idiosyncratic and unique to him."

Stardust is a coming-of-age story for the electronic age about a 16-year-old gay, African-American boy who, according to Roussèvre, "is trying to find something more than the violence and chaos he's facing." The main character never appears onstage. Instead, his voice is projected via videos of tweets and text messages. It's Roussèvre's most interdisciplinary piece ever — not in the number of elements he uses, but in how intimately and deeply woven together they are. Cari Ann Shim Sham designed the video imagery, grimes the sound and Roussèvre the movement.

Roussèvre and grimes met in the UCLA department of world arts and cultures/dance, where Roussèvre is still a professor of choreography and grimes was, at the time, a returning professional graduate student. Roussèvre became one of grimes' advisors on *Bulletproof Deli*, a solo piece grimes premiered in 2008 at Highways Performance Space.

"Sabela is one of the few people who share..." Roussèvre begins, before switching his train of thought. "I love using really accessible African-American pop culture. But the work is out there, experimental, challenging in its shape. *Bulletproof Deli* is a perfect example. Really accessible. I love that sense of people grounded in African-American pop culture who are also pushing boundaries and exploring new forms. In many ways, he's just the perfect viewer for this piece. Because it's trying to do that."

grimes is equally as effusive when asked about Roussèvre. He speaks of Roussèvre's talent as both a writer/storyteller and choreographer, and his genius when it comes to "knowing how to make them work with each other and work with overall themes, concepts and narratives" in whatever piece he's working on. grimes admires Roussèvre's ability and vision to select the perfect ensembles for his works.

Everyone involved in *Stardust* is UCLA-affiliated, from the 10 members in his dance company Reality to grimes and Shim Sham. Filling out the list are an undergraduate, a few BAs, one current and several former MFAs, and alumni, all ranging from age 19 to 53. Roussèvre joined UCLA's department of world arts and cultures/dance in 1996, and is now one of the highest-ranking choreography professors.

"Several of us are from the East Village, '80s and '90s New York, that community of alternative dance makers," says Roussèvre. "UCLA has become a mini-East Village. Smart people making work who want to talk about it, driven but humble, hardworking. UCLA has been an indispensable part of being in LA for me."

Just as the creative community at UCLA has supported Roussèvre, the university has benefited from the progressive choreographer's work and ideas.

In the last four years, starting with *Stardust*, in every UCLA spring quarter four choreographers make new work in a course, and students can get credit.

"We have a lot of working choreographers on faculty here," Roussèvre says. "Academia and art-making can be a challenging blend. As a working artist, you can make it work, feed your process, work with younger artists and get health insurance. Art-making is what we bring to the table. How can we make room within an academic curriculum for the actual process of art-

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making? It feels like the first time we've been able to successfully do that. One of the best parts of *Stardust* has been redefining the role of art-making within the academic curriculum."

By the time the 85-minute piece has its official premiere in January 2014 at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland, it will have been a four-year project, which has changed every year — not surprisingly, as tweets and texts are the foundation of *Stardust*'s dialogue. For example, with the invention of iPhone's Autocorrect, misspelled words are not as prevalent. Roussèvre also says that at the beginning of the process, the piece was totally in textspeak, but that is no longer true.

"People were like, huh?" says Roussèvre. "We have to communicate with the [age] 15s and 75s."

Roussèvre uses many adjectives to describe his work: schmaltzy, romantic, New Agey, postmodern spirituality. All of this finds a home in *Stardust* alongside grit, ghetto wit and violence as experienced in the Third Ward neighborhood in Houston, where Roussèvre was born and raised. It's also the first piece in which he specifically references Christianity. And he's afraid his message will be misunderstood.

"I fear people will think it's a retreat as opposed to an opening. They'll think, 'He's turning into a Bible thumper.' I'm not saying the return to religion is how we'll save ourselves. But I am saying acts of kindness is how we're going to save ourselves."

grimes also wants to clear up any misrepresentation of the music he contributes, which complements the Nat King Cole songs Roussèvre uses in *Stardust*. His is not hip-hop music. It's "soul music that is digital funk with an analog heart," says grimes via phone a couple of weeks before the LA unveiling. "Hip-hop is too narrow. It's inspired by hip-hop, specifically the Bomb Squad, the producers for Public Enemy. People think electronic music has no soul, but the soul and heart come from supporting the narrative, wanting to be in conversation with the Nat King Cole music and that era of music."

Being in the business as long as he has, Roussèvre knows there's only one way to address both artists' concerns about being misinterpreted. "In the end, art-making is such an abstraction," he says, "and the hardest thing is to let it go."

Regardless of how their work is digested, both artists are deeply moved by *Stardust*.

"There hasn't been a time throughout the development of *Stardust* that I have not laughed or cried," says grimes. "Yesterday, I was trying to keep it together, but there's this idea that we tell narratives through art to humanize people or groups of people. In David's case, he's not humanizing the main character. He reminds us in a very particular way that in general African Americans are people. That this young man is human. We're reminded in a way because we connect. It's such a human story."



David Roussèvre



D. Sabela Grimes

Complicated Brew: 'Stardust' Explores Intimacy & Technology (RADAR L.A.)

Posted: 10/01/2013 2:39 pm

By Noah J. Nelson (@noahjnelson)

Technology and performance make dangerous dance partners for theater.

"Stardust", a new dance-theater piece from writer-director-choreographer David Roussèvre, took a preview bow in Los Angeles this past week as part of the Radar L.A. international contemporary theater festival based out of the REDCAT* space in Downtown L.A.. The performance took on the challenge of mixing dance, projected text, and spoken word not just for art's sake, but as a means of tackling the ways that technology allows us to express our inner lives.

We spoke with Roussèvre about this ambitious project that will be touring the country early next year.

Roussèvre said that "Stardust" is about "the tension between intimacy and technology and how complicated a brew that is."

Roussèvre explores that tension through the story of J.R., a young gay African-American man struggling with his identity against the backdrop of a judgmental church culture and the pressure to conform. J.R. is torn between the impulse to fit in, which leads him to act the part of the thug, and a deeper desire to do the right thing.

The catch is: we never see the lead character. J.R.'s presence is felt through the projection of text messages sent to strangers and illustrated by the choreography executed by Roussèvre's corps of athletic dancers. The clash of technology and human emotion in

the narrative is embodied by the clash of technology and human motion on stage.



"So there was a tension there that we were playing with," said Roussèvre, "between anonymity, invisibility, intimacy and presence. Ironically not being present gives him the most feeling of intimacy that he has in his life."

Part of J.R.'s desire to find solace with strangers is borne out of the rejection he finds in the religious community he is a part of. His hidden identity as a homosexual comes under fire from his town's pastor. J.R. seeks to understand his place in the universe by turning to what he calls "the Internet", which Roussèvre explains is how the character hears "Internet".

"So he finds his God, someone who he can always turn to. Someone who is always there. Someone who has these mystical powers of being but not being. Someone who hears and reads our prayers. He finds his version of God through technology. Through the Internet and sending out these text messages that no one reads."

Roussèvre remains fascinated by the tension within this idea.

"There's actually something quite beautiful in that and actually something quite dangerous in it at the same moment. It starts to represent this solace to him while also being a dangerous place for a child to find God."

Roussèvre teaches at UCLA, and compares his own religious upbringing as a "good little Catholic boy" comforted by the idea of an impersonal God who hears his secret confessions with that of his students.

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

"Now everything has to be witnessed. In the era of reality TV, it's not enough to pray to God, I actually have to pray and have someone hear them."

"I thought: 'Wow. It's almost like the feelings don't exist anymore unless they're witnessed.' There's something really beautiful about that thought: another human being has to experience my life for it to have validity."

Again Roussèvre sees danger, and irony, in that concept.

"Unless someone knows my secrets, they don't really exist as secrets. That's ironic because a secret is something no one knows."

While the textual elements carry the narrative of J.R.'s life, Roussèvre sees the dance portion of the piece as driving the emotional core. As the tension between technology and intimacy is thematically explored in "Stardust", a tension between dance and narrative is used to uncover layers of meaning that would be harder to discover using one medium alone.

Not that the use of disparate disciplines-- dance, video, projection--doesn't come with their own set of headaches.

"I've never created a piece that's so steeped in technology. With three projectors going at the same time, and trying to time lighting, projector A, B and C and dancing. It was the biggest nightmare in all my years of creating work. Every minute I'm sitting in there going 'I will never work with technology again.'

"Then you see the end result and say, 'How could I not work with technology again?'"

"Stardust" will have its official World Première January 31st, 2014 in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland.

*Roy and Edna Disney/Cal Arts Theater

Image: Video Art by Cari Ann Shim Sham and dancers in David Roussèvre's Stardust at Radar L.A.
Photo Credit: Steven Gunther.

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Raves for David Roussève's SAUDADE

Los Angles Times 4/3/09

Charles McNulty

"The struggles of Black Americans—oppression and abuse, poverty and neglect AIDS and alienation—register in the body of this dancer-choreographer, whose death-haunted imagination is drawn to the polarity and paradox of bondage and antic freedom... Dante's collective notion of 'our life' is particularly apt as Roussève moves from the personal to the historical and on to the universal."

"...the piece ultimately attains that philosophical state, in which after an episode of grief, a glint of sunlight or a fragrant breeze can simultaneously moisten your eyes and leave you smiling in gratitude."

The Star Ledger (Newark) 2/13/09

"Words alone cannot satisfy David Roussève, a storyteller turned choreographer whose magical dance-theater piece "Saudade"... is packed with stories—engrossing tales of love and hardship, cliff-hanging adventures within the heart's interior."

Dance Magazine March 2009

Rita Felciano

"David Roussève is a poet as well as a choreographer... his latest work *Saudade* impressed... an intriguing storyteller with a tall and lanky frame, a face chiseled by idle age and a vocal command that even an opera singer would envy."

Chicago Tribune March 14, 2009

Sid Smith

"Roussève is a master monologist and artful mimic, seductively charming even as the truth of what he speaks stabs you in the heart."

Village Voice March 4, 2009

Deborah Jowitt

"...Roussève's words are not about ideal solutions; they're about small events that briefly relieve pain or lift spirits. And about how we remember them... When I ponder what I've seen, images that seem isolated during the performance coalesce in my mind and link more securely to Roussève's themes... Whatever culture we're from, is that how we eat life—no matter how much it burns?"

The Washington Times February 9, 2009

Jean Battey Lewis

"Through it all, the exuberant humanity, flashes of wit and sadness shining through this provocative work give it a surprising and haunting afterlife. Mr. Roussève's work needs to be seen here more often. How about the Kennedy Center next time?"

The Washington Post February 7, 2009

Sarah Kaufman

"Roussève is one of the modern dance world's great stage personalities. Tall and lean, with a cascade of graying dreadlocks and the taut, commanding profile of a Cherokee chief, he combines a powerful physical presence with an uncanny ability to channel the experiences of the weakest and most marginalized among us. He inhabits characters with an eerily convincing depth of feeling... In the end, 'Saudade' comes close to the same kind of colliding extremes that sparked its creation. Only Roussève could layer fado music, a dead cat and a young girl's simultaneous discovery of evil and redemption into a narrative as tender as it is tough-minded."

Los Angeles Times, 4/3/09

REVIEW

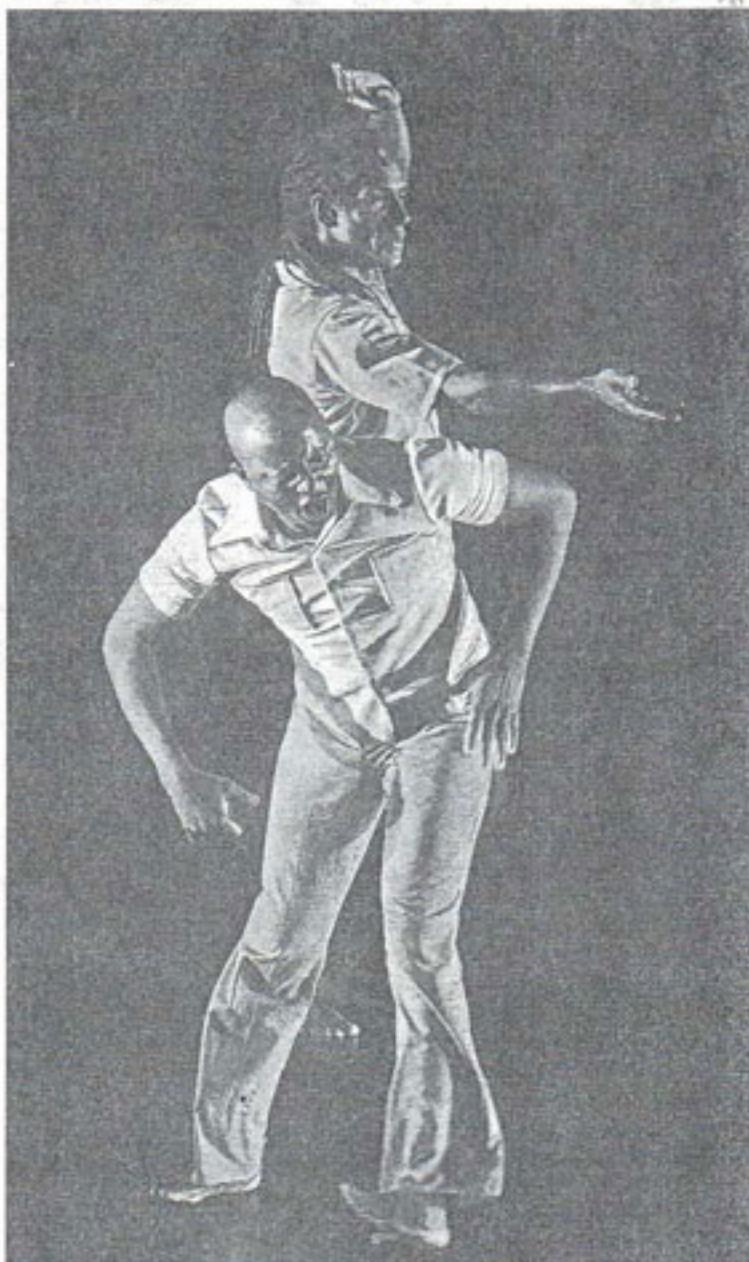
Spoken words, flowing limbs

David Roussèvre's 'Saudade' weaves a bittersweet African American tale.

HARLES McNULTY
THEATER CRITIC

"Saudade," the untranslatable title of David Roussèvre's dance-theater piece, which runs through Sunday at the Freud Playhouse courtesy of UCLA Live, is a Portuguese word encompassing longing for what has been lost and hope for its unlikely return. The meaning is as emotionally rich as it is elusive — qualities that fit this meditative collage, which is suffused with mourning, mystery and more than a little head-scratching mayhem.

Working again with Reality, his multiethnic, transnational L.A.-based company, Roussèvre narrates a series of slippery, highly subjective explorations into the "bittersweet" experience of being. The monologues he delivers, spoken in the Southern cadences of African American characters (including a former slave girl who has learned to write and a mother trying to rescue her babies in Katrina-flooded New Orleans), are incorporated in a kaleidoscope of video projections, eclectic world dance selections and bursts of movement theater that often seem uncorked from improvisational games. Fado, a folksy Portuguese blues, provides musical flavor.



KEN HIBELLY Los Angeles Times

BODILY NARRATIVE: Movement and monologue propel David Roussèvre, background, and Olivier Tarpaga.

David Roussèvre/ Reality

Where: Freud Playhouse,
UCLA, Westwood
When: 8 p.m. Friday and
Saturday; 7 p.m. Sunday.
Ends Sunday.
Price: \$34 and \$46
Contact: (310) 825-2101 or
www.uclalive.org
Running time: 1 hour, 40
minutes

Moving incrementally and at times sluggishly across the stage — the passage is made deliberately epic — Roussèvre appears in no hurry to get to his final destination. Dreadlocks going gray cap a graceful, not-yet-old frame. Yet the past weighs down the present. The struggles of black Americans — oppression and abuse, poverty and neglect, AIDS and alienation — register in the body of this dancer-choreographer, whose death-haunted imagination is drawn to the polarity and paradox of bondage and antic freedom.

There's mention early on of a woods, and it's hard not to hear echoes of Dante's opening to "Inferno": "When I had journeyed half of our life's way, I found myself within a shadowed forest, for I had lost the path that does not stray." Dante's collective notion of "our life" is particularly apt, as Roussèvre moves from the personal to the historical and on to the universal.

Circulating around our storyteller, guide and existential conduit is a frenzy of physical activity. The seven performers in Roussèvre's orbit — many of them former graduate students from UCLA's world arts and cultures de-

(Cont'd on back)

partment, where he's a professor of choreography — press upon us an awareness of their corporeal life. We hear their breath rumble through their throats and chests. We see their vulnerability as they fall to the ground or get beaten. We gape as they descend into the adrenaline-infused throes of whatever mood has overtaken them, aggressive one minute, silly the next.

The canvas is hectic, but the overall look of the production has a remarkable integrity. A scenic backdrop, designed by Peter Melville, resembles a crossword puzzle that seems destined to be filled in. David Ferri's lighting adds hallucinatory luster. Ashley Hunt's video effects are most effective when most subliminal.

If some of the images seem overwrought (a woman on film crying as she stuffs chili peppers into her mouth) or jejune (routine explosions of wearying horseplay), the piece ultimately attains that philosophical state, in which after an episode of grief, a glint of sunlight or a fragrant breeze can simultaneously moisten your eyes and leave you smiling in gratitude.

charles.mcnulty@latimes.com

Dance

Dean Moss, Yoon Jin Kim, and David Roussèvre Practice the Art of Displacement

By Deborah Jowitt

In the crosscultural kitchen of postmodern dance drama, it's sometimes hard to tell whether the chef has embarked on a particular creative process to discover more about himself and his roots, or more about the Other. Most often, it's a bit of both. The customers may be charmed, enlightened, and/or confused. *Kisaeng Becomes You* by Dean Moss (African American) and Yoon Jin Kim (Korean) is performed by five women dancers from Korea and several different recruits from the New York audience each night. The cast of David Roussèvre's *Saudade* includes Roussèvre, two other African Americans, an Indonesian, a native of Burkina Faso, and a dancer who studied India's Bharata Natyam for 22 years.



Sri Susilowati and Taisha Paggett in David Roussèvre's "Saudade."

directly into the earpiece of the "trainee." Lured from her own life into another virtual culture, this spur-of-the-moment performer is bound by its rules, and distanced by the prompting and the inevitable pauses from the import of what she's doing and saying. The others' final act, besides applauding her, is to offer her money.

Aspects of a kisaeng's life are abstracted in a variety of ways and given a postmodern twist. In the beginning, a woman is bending over a table; the video shows us that she's embroidering her hand (!), slipping a needle under the topmost layer of skin (kisaeng were skilled seamstresses). Soyeoun Lim rubs a microphone over Jeongeon Yang's face and neck, and we imagine a novice being trained in fellatio (afterward Lim brandishes the mike like a penis, then bites it noisily). In one sequence, Jiseon Kwon and Bae, smiling and servile, usher in an imaginary male visitor, then gradually go dead—all expression draining from their faces and bodies. For what seems an eternity, they stand staring at us. Several times, all the women revolve on tiptoe, heads back, mouths open, like fish at the surface of a pond.

They also show us the clientele. Lim lines up glasses of beer, rim to rim, balances shot glasses of whiskey on top of them, and, with one gesture, knocks the tiny glasses into the larger ones. Party time. Channeling their inner males, the wonderful performers ad lib, down their drinks, and encourage two women from the audience to drain their glasses. Things get rowdy, a raucous song is sung. One of the volunteer performers is educated in the delivery of kisaeng poetry, the other is given the video camera and told to shoot the fun.

It is she who ends the piece. On display. They've taken away the camera and left her alone center stage in her trim little dress and high-heeled boots. She looks pleadingly over to where the others are sitting on the sidelines, giggles, gazes at us, decides to be brave. She stands there for quite a while before the lights dim. Suddenly: a kisaeng waiting to be chosen for the evening's diversions.

Roussèvre's *Saudade* is much more elaborate—an olla so rich in ingredients that, flavorful though it is, you can't easily locate its essence. The music too throws you a bit off the scent. *Saudade*—performed by a multicultural cast about experiences anchored in Roussèvre's personal, very American stories—is accompanied by nine recordings of Portuguese fado. What these songs do underscore, however, is the universality of yearning and not getting.

Roussèvre, the piece's writer, director, and choreographer, is also its leading performer and anchorman. He greets us and jokes with us, before bringing up the fine line between life and death, pleasure and pain, and retreating to a distant corner to begin a slow walk forward along a diagonal path. It takes him almost the entire performance to arrive where he started. Along the way, he stops to tell stories, each stage of his journey marked by a white pillar. Peter Melville's backdrop looks somewhat like a vast crossword puzzle waiting to be filled in, but most of Roussèvre's words are not about ideal solutions; they're about small events that briefly relieve pain or lift spirits. And about how we remember them.

The man is—has always been—a marvelous storyteller, and he recounts his tales in beautifully chosen, often witty words. He stoops over and makes his voice raspy to become a down-and-out old man who falls in love with a mangy tomcat—a cat who can walk on sharp-edged fences and still have "soft little kitty cat paws." Roussèvre's tone is higher and more innocent when he speaks for a slave girl who saw her older sister horribly beaten for teaching her little sibling to write her own name: "Sally." In one unforgettable scene, Sally is brutally deflowered by her master in a wooden shack with cracks and holes in its walls. She stretches a hand through one of those holes and feels her sister's tears dropping into her palm.

The seven other vibrant performers—all either faculty members or graduate students in UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures, where Roussèvre is a professor—echo aspects of his stories but also contribute more obliquely. It's not so surprising to watch tall Taisha Paggett let small noises in her throat build up to physical, vocal frenzy, until the others soothe her. Or see Nehara Kalev angrily tie Anjali Tata-Hudson's feet together and take her away. People fall and roll on. Some crawl along roped together, and others free them. They dance slowly, awkwardly together as if drugged by pain. However, it's utterly unexpected to listen to Marianne M. Kim emit a fantastic, high ululation that sounds a bit like the flourishes of baroque opera in hyper-drive. Sri Susilowati yells at her to stop, but she can't. Finally, Susilowati bares her belly, and says teasingly, "You wouldn't want to miss this."

The performers occasionally interact with Roussèvre as he tells his stories (including ones about his own despondence during a hospital stay, and a woman's account of what she lost and what she gained during the floods that Katrina visited on New Orleans). They also comment on events as they occur in the dance. While Esther M. Baker Tarpaga and Olivier Tarpaga spar playfully in words and movement, Kalev intermittently struts through wearing a bikini and high heels and holding up signs that announce, for example, "Round Two. I think they are faking it."

When I ponder what I've seen, images that seemed isolated during the performance coalesce in my mind and link more securely to Roussèvre's themes. I think back to Susilowati several times offering a red pepper to her colleagues, even offering to pay Roussèvre a dollar if he'll try a bite of this Indonesian staple (he pays no attention). Later a close-up video of her appears on a screen. She's cramming pepper after pepper into her mouth, while tears gradually begin to run down her cheeks. Whatever culture we're from, is that how we eat life—no matter how much it burns?

Moss, who taught for a year in Tokyo and has often visited Korea, was inspired to collaborate with Kim by a book, *Hwang Jini & Other Courtesans Poets From the Last Korean Dynasty*. Lines from these compressed poems, such as "What is this love? . . . Mine breaks to a sharp edge within me," scroll in white letters across the back of the stage, and are spoken onstage quietly, almost noncommittally.

Amid a flurry of video, live feed cameras, and images projected on two screens, the five vivid performers pare down, intensify, and explode the role of the kisaeng (a carefully trained, government or court-controlled "entertainer"). She must be young, beautiful, cultivated, dexterous—adept at entertaining high-born men (or simply wealthy ones). As delicate as the peonies we see onscreen, she's charming at the banquet and (perhaps) compliant in the bed-chamber.

In a fascinating exercise in displacement, a handsome woman, perhaps in her late fifties, is brought up from the audience (I believe recruits are first approached in the lobby). The five performers greet her warmly, wire her, dress her in the full underskirt of a hanbok, place an elaborate wig on her head, and educate her in behavior. Mihyun Lee tells her what to do, while Yuree Bae demonstrates. The others praise her progress enthusiastically. Her final duty is to perform alone the slow turns, gazes, gentle arm gestures, and slight swoon, while reciting the poetry. She must pick up a fallen scarf and wipe her eyes. One woman videotapes her and another snaps her picture. This time Lee's coaching is unheard by the audience; it feeds directly into the earpiece of the "trainee."

Lured from her own life into another virtual culture, this spur-of-the-moment performer is bound by its rules, and distanced by the prompting and the inevitable pauses from the import of what she's doing and saying. The others' final act, besides applauding her, is to offer her money.

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It is she who ends the piece. On display. They've taken away the camera and left her alone center stage in her trim little dress and high-heeled boots. She looks pleadingly over to where the others are sitting on the sidelines, giggles, gazes at us, decides to be brave. She stands there for quite a while before the lights dim. Suddenly: a kisaeng waiting to be chosen for the evening's diversions.

Roussèvre's *Saudade* is much more elaborate—an olla so rich in ingredients that, flavorful though it is, you can't easily locate its essence. The music too throws you a bit off the scent. *Saudade*—performed by a multicultural cast about experiences anchored in Roussèvre's personal, very American stories—is accompanied by nine recordings of Portuguese fado. What these songs do underscore, however, is the universality of yearning and not getting.

Roussèvre, the piece's writer, director, and choreographer, is also its leading performer and anchorman. He greets us and jokes with us, before bringing up the fine line between life and death, pleasure and pain, and retreating to a distant corner to begin a slow walk forward along a diagonal path. It takes him almost the entire performance to arrive where he started. Along the way, he stops to tell stories, each stage of his journey marked by a white pillar. Peter Melville's backdrop looks somewhat like a vast crossword puzzle waiting to be filled in, but most of Roussèvre's words are not about ideal solutions; they're about small events that briefly relieve pain or lift spirits. And about how we remember them.

The man is—has always been—a marvelous storyteller, and he recounts his tales in beautifully chosen, often witty words. He stoops over and makes his voice raspy to become a down-and-out old man who falls in love with a mangy tomcat—a cat who can walk on sharp-edged fences and still have "soft little kitty cat paws." Roussèvre's tone is higher and more innocent when he speaks for a slave girl who saw her older sister horribly beaten for teaching her little sibling to write her own name: "Sally." In one unforgettable scene, Sally is brutally deflowered by her master in a wooden shack with cracks and holes in its walls. She stretches a hand through one of those holes and feels her sister's tears dropping into her palm.

The seven other vibrant performers—all either faculty members or graduate students in UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures, where Roussèvre is a professor—echo aspects of his stories but also contribute more obliquely. It's not so surprising to watch tall Taisha Paggett let small noises in her throat build up to physical, vocal frenzy, until the others soothe her. Or see Nehara Kalev angrily tie Anjali Tata-Hudson's feet together and take her away. People fall and roll on. Some crawl along roped together, and others free them. They dance slowly, awkwardly together as if drugged by pain. However, it's utterly unexpected to listen to Marianne M. Kim emit a fantastic, high ululation that sounds a bit like the flourishes of baroque opera in hyper-drive. Sri Susilowati yells at her to stop, but she can't. Finally, Susilowati bares her belly, and says teasingly, "You wouldn't want to miss this."

The performers occasionally interact with Roussèvre as he tells his stories (including ones about his own despondence during a hospital stay, and a woman's account of what she lost and what she gained during the floods that Katrina visited on New Orleans). They also comment on events as they occur in the dance. While Esther M. Baker Tarpaga and Olivier Tarpaga spar playfully in words and movement, Kalev intermittently struts through wearing a bikini and high heels and holding up signs that announce, for example, "Round Two. I think they are faking it."

When I ponder what I've seen, images that seemed isolated during the performance coalesce in my mind and link more securely to Roussèvre's themes. I think back to Susilowati several times offering a red pepper to her colleagues, even offering to pay Roussèvre a dollar if he'll try a bite of this Indonesian staple (he pays no attention). Later a close-up video of her appears on a screen. She's cramming pepper after pepper into her mouth, while tears gradually begin to run down her cheeks. Whatever culture we're from, is that how we eat life—no matter how much it burns?

The Star-Ledger

Rousseve asks ultimate question with mesmerizing style

by Robert Johnson/The Star-Ledger

Friday February 13, 2009, 1:18 PM.

David Rousseve /*Reality*. Where: Alexander Kasser Theatre, Montclair State University, One Normal Ave., Montclair. When: 8 p.m. Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday. How much: \$15. Call (973) 655-5112 or visit peakperfs.org.



ARISTIDE ECONOMOPOULOS/THE STAR-LEDGER

David Rousseve's dance-theater piece "Saudade" made its local debut on Thursday at the Alexander Kasser Theatre in Montclair

headed on a journey deep into that forest where the imagination runs free in dreams. The choreographer introduces himself as our guide, a man on a quest for the meaning of life. As he repeats his first sentence, however, it grows shorter and shorter until the words vanish in a gasp of air and a cursive gesture.

Only by abandoning words and entering the body, its breath labored and rattling as it shivers and contracts, its movements quick and spontaneously evasive, will we get where we are going. Even so, the meaning of life remains hard to grasp.

In "Saudade," the body asserts itself suddenly and emotionally. Its struggles are unexpected and inexplicable. Rousseve concludes the twin experiences of living ourselves and caring for those we love, and the certainty that we must continue, are what really matter in the end.

This is heady stuff, and "Saudade" makes it beautiful, with its twinkling digital backdrop, its multiple plots knit together by Rousseve's magnetic presence. Seven dancers surround him as he walks slowly across the stage following a diagonal path beside milestones that accumulate, pausing by these markers to tell his tales.

The other cast members, an international community, have brought their own dances from far-flung homes in Asia and Africa. Transplanted to the American South, these movement vocabularies point to the universality of human experience as a bittersweet, Roussevian party-mix of tears and joy. Portuguese fado music, itself a jumble of heartache and ecstasy, supplies transitions, and strumming guitars lighten the mood when it threatens to turn grim.

As a group, the dancers slide and drag themselves across the stage, undertaking effortful journeys that parallel Rousseve's own. Skits and childlike games, which can be humorous or disturbing, seem to echo the content of the stories. They also add their own themes as dancers fight or try to prevent individuals from expressing themselves.

Boldly employing a Thai chili pepper with incendiary powers, Rousseve invites the audience to question his stories' truthfulness. Are the performers "faking it," as one of them suggests? Maybe so, but fans of author Toni Morrison especially will recognize the hallucinatory dilemmas of Rousseve's characters. Contradictory, perverse, uplifting -- his theater distills the essence of truth, and it is potent.

Words alone cannot satisfy David Rousseve, a storyteller turned choreographer whose magical dance-theater piece "Saudade" made its local debut on Thursday at the Alexander Kasser Theatre in Montclair. The evening is packed with stories -- engrossing tales of love and hardship, cliffhanging adventures within the heart's interior.

Rousseve's stories, melding African-American history and his own experiences, are of a kind to leave listeners wide-eyed. They take us from slavery to Hurricane Katrina, calamities rendered immediate by the drawling voices of his protagonists: Sally, a former slave who treasures her halting literacy; a lonely man who falls in love with a stray cat; another man on the brink of death in the hospital; a woman who saves her children but loses parts of her memory during the family's hellish escape from New Orleans.

By themselves, however, these stories are not enough. Rousseve signals early on that we are

DANCE: Rousseve considers human condition

Jean Battey Lewis

Monday, February 9, 2009

David Rousseve is one of the most provocative figures on the modern dance scene: a multitalented artist, a low-key but incisively compelling performer eloquent in both words and movement, and a choreographer of wide-ranging imagination. His vibrant theater pieces tend toward the surreal with occasionally a non-sequitur dadaist touch.

All this is present in vivid detail in David Rousseve/Reality's "Saudade," which had its world premiere Thursday in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center's Kay Theatre at the University of Maryland. His palette includes wordy ruminations, hysterical outbursts, screaming fits, vocal ululations and a fetching woman in a brief pink bikini who strolls around the stage holding up a sign.

The pain and cruelty of slavery is a recurrent theme in Mr. Rousseve's work. A decade and a half ago, he brought a work here, "Urban Scenes, Creole Dreams," in which the focus was on the rape of a slave. This time, the beating of a slave, Sally, is a haunting centerpiece of "Saudade."

In a high, scratchy voice, Mr. Rousseve, as Sally, recounts being taught to write by her sister and the slave owner's reaction: "The day after I turned nine, he found out I could write and, more important, who done taught me. He strung my sister up by her hands and beat her hisself. I had never seen him whip a slave hisself."

He goes on, "After ten or so licks, my sister black out. The weight of her body pulled one of her arm bones out of her shoulder part. But the joke was on him, because with jest one good arm, she was never so good at picking again.

"I do not know if she felt my tears as they fell onto her back and ran into the tracks made by the whip. I do not know if she heard my whisper, 'I would give my life so that you not suffer this way.' And I do not know if it would have helped if she had."

The collagelike elements of the work cover a bittersweet, wide-ranging look at the human condition. "Saudade" has no exact English translation but suggests longing or nostalgia.



Members of the David Rousseve/Reality troupe (from left) Olivier Tarpaga, David Rousseve and Esther Baker-Tarpaga perform "Saudade." The work incorporates contemporary and traditional Portuguese fado music and stories of slaves in the American South.

Among the many disparate elements adding to the work's richness: the haunting Portuguese fado music, David Ferri's lighting design, Peter Melville's set design, Ashley Hunt's video design and, most of all, the remarkable talents of Mr. Rousseve's seven-member dance group. The troupe brings remarkable, full-throated strength to the stage, from djembe drummer Olivier Tarpaga's wildly exuberant dancing to a woman gamely chewing on, then spitting out, red hot peppers, seen on video as tears stream down her cheeks.

Through it all, the exuberant humanity, flashes of wit and sadness shining through this provocative work give it a surprising and haunting afterlife. Mr. Rousseve's work needs to be seen here more often. How about the Kennedy Center next time?

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MAXIMUM RATING: FOUR STARS

The Washington Post

Performance

A Worthwhile Emotional Roller Coaster

By Sarah Kaufman
Washington Post Staff Writer
Saturday, February 7, 2009; Page C08

One day, some breakthrough string-theory of the heart is sure to explain why beauty and damnation can be perceived at the same moment, why grief and joy can hit you at once. Until then, David Roussève's dance-theater work "Saudade," which had its world premiere Thursday at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, offers a succinct and lyrical look at how the highs and lows of life collide.

For example: You fall in love with a nasty, mangy alley cat with breath like rotten tuna and paws as soft and caressing as the kiss you're not getting from anyone else. Or: You're languishing near death in a hospital bed, clicking through reruns of "I Love Lucy," ready to give up when the one person you long for walks through the door, bringing you flowers and a reason to live.

These are some of the stories Roussève tells in a series of witty and wrenching monologues, and they bring us to the heart of his argument with the human condition. His beef: Life is complicated, a mystery that can't be solved. It's hardly a new discovery, but to say his lament is shared by anyone who breathes is to take nothing away from Roussève's fierce, poetic journey to explore it.

Roussève is one of the modern dance world's great stage personalities. Tall and lean, with a cascade of graying dreadlocks and the taut, commanding profile of a Cherokee chief, he combines a powerful physical presence with an uncanny ability to channel the experiences of the weakest and most marginalized among us. He inhabits characters with an eerily convincing depth of feeling. If you had seen him in 1994 in "Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams" at Lisner Auditorium, you would not forget how, his voice rising to a falsetto, he brought forth the story of his Creole grandmother -- a tale layered in loss, pain and undying will.



"Saudade" intersperses tales of the odd places of love lost and found with moves inspired by Portuguese Fado music. (Photos By Jorge Vismara)

"Saudade" brings Roussève, a choreography professor at UCLA, back to the Washington area for the first time in nearly a decade. The 90-minute piece, which closed last night, takes its title from a Portuguese word roughly translated as bittersweet or nostalgia, but the experience of it isn't always wistful or melancholic; in fact, it's often funny. In its best moments, "Saudade" is disarmingly blunt. Take the beginning: Roussève ambles downstage to declare, "This is the story of me, searching desperately for the meaning of life."

The work proceeds as a surreal flashback to moments that defy comprehension. Some are autobiographical (the cat, the hospital). In other moments Roussève gives voice to others. One forms the blistering narrative spine of "Saudade": a teenage slave named Sally, whose brutal memories Roussève unsnaps in a high, rasping voice. Detailing the horror of being raped by her master, Sally describes how she was able to reach a hand through a hole in the wall and touch her sister on the other side, whose tears of helplessness filled Sally's palm. "At the exact same moment when my body found out how much I could be hated," she tells us, "my heart found out how much I could be loved."

It was moments like this that caught the heart. Less effective were the scenes involving eight other performers. To them Roussève left the difficult work of expanding on his themes with expressionistic movement and verbal play. These episodes lacked the urgency and revelation of Roussève's stories, however, and one felt impatient for him to break in with another tale. That is, except for any moment, brief as they were, when Taisha Paggett, Anjali Tata-Hudson or Olivier Tarpaga shivered and stamped to Portuguese Fado songs. These sweet-sour musical offerings, with their tremulous vocals and high, mandolin-like notes, brought all the beauty and pain of "Saudade" into shimmering focus. Roussève let loose at the end, and the musical flight of his arms soaring outward from his unburdened breast was just the glorious synthesis of delicacy and strength of spirit we'd been waiting for.

In the end, "Saudade" comes close to the same kind of colliding extremes that sparked its creation. Only Roussève could layer Fado music, a dead cat and a young girl's simultaneous discovery of evil and redemption into a narrative as tender as it is tough-minded. Here's hoping he doesn't wait another decade to return.

time out:reviews

DANCE/THEATRE



The 10 Year Chat

David Rousseve, Contact Theatre

The Ten Year Chat is a ravishing tapestry of dance and monologue woven from ten years of performance. Rousseve binds humour and deep poignancy with threads of narrative about his own life and that of his grandmother in the post-slavery Southern States. His casual charisma and simple joy in his own gorgeous body and fluid dance belie the depth of emotion and profundity of the work, and the wisdom and comfort in the stories of young and old. If he is ever back in Manchester, I would beg you all to go and see him, and become better, fuller, richer people. Make sure that more of these masterpieces don't pass you by. Check out the Contact Theatre competition on page 22 and the rest of their Queerupnorth schedule, while you're at it. Breathtaking.

★★★★★

Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2001

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Roussèvre Finds His Rhythm in Storytelling

Dance Review

By JENNIFER FISHER
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

When choreographer David Roussèvre was a child, he had outrageous dreams, aid early in his impeccably ed, emotionally burnished solo show at the Getty Museum on Friday night.

At his first day of "integrated school" in Texas, he almost blurted out his real ambition: to become "a fat black lady who sang gospel." Surrounded by unknown white people, he thought better and spoke of a civil rights role model instead. He was rewarded by the teacher, whose "you're a credit to your race" comment tipped him off about future compromises.

Roussèvre's "The Ten Year Chat," named for its excerpts from a decade of his work, and also featuring

recent choreography, resounded with poignant reflections of split-personality-making decisions like this early one. In autobiographical monologues that dotted the 80-minute piece, he also told about the days when he longed for sophisticated soap opera roles after graduating from Princeton, but found himself cast repeatedly as a domestic or, one memorable time, "a primitive jungle native in a Pamper's-influenced loincloth."

Nor did he escape pervasive categories in the dance world. The glitzy jazz dancing he first loved wasn't art, the modern and post-modern gatekeepers told him. But meaning gets lost in too much non-sequitur abstraction, Roussèvre indicated, illustrating with a sample of release-based "noodling" that drew knowing laughs. His compromise was to combine his "artsy" and "tacky" sides in dance segments from a new work

called "The Jazz Project."

They were a seamless, invigorating fusion of loose-limbed, quirky syncopation and the rhythmic snap of classical tap. Recordings of Billy Strayhorn's elegant jazz compositions fit the mood perfectly.

Roussèvre's use of text and storytelling illuminated other themes that emerged—the loss of a dream, the loss of love through cruelty, the succor of love and remembrance.

Making occasional onstage changes in darkness from jeans to loose, silky pants to underwear or nothing at all, Roussèvre was illuminated stunningly by the hallowing hues of David Ferri's lighting. Along the way, he revived his eloquent sharecropping grandmother (from "The Creole Series") and a fictional AIDS patient who yearns for his father's love (from "The Dream Series").

The characterizations were often broad, not naturalistic; Roussèvre sometimes seems to sing his speeches and, when he's himself, projects with relentless brightness. Yet the stylized moods worked, making transitions from talking to dancing seem plausible, whether he disintegrated into gesture from one agonized utterance or launched a steely sculptural monologue that made physical his thoughts and emotion.

In "The Ten Year Chat," Roussèvre has woven a wistful but sturdy fabric of exploration and revelation.

He presented the words of his ancestral mentors as poetry, made mourning into memorable gesture and danced with intelligent abandon.

Looking up, he seemed to see the same moon that sustained his grandmother during dark times and, through Roussèvre's creation, still sheds a little encouraging light on all of us.

Weekend

The New York Times

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1999

DANCE REVIEW

Love Stories Outlasting Their Time And Place

By JENNIFER DUNNING

David Roussèvre grew up hearing his Creole grandmother's tales about old times and old folk. Her spirit has informed much of his dance and theater work over the last decade. It is present in his ambitious new "Love Songs," which opened on Thursday at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Harvey Lichtenstein Theater.

The two-hour work begins with a storyteller, Mr. Roussèvre in the guise of a talkative old back-country black man with long memories. His story is essentially that of two antebellum slaves, Sarah and John, whose love cannot be broken by separation or racist brutality.

"Love Songs" opens with a haunting image of a modern-day mother, played with quietly searing intensity by Valerie A. Winborne, who smothers her sleeping child. Born with the ability to see into the future, she understands how hard his life will be because, unlike her, he cannot see more than the grim everyday realities of the world he lives in.

As choreographer and director, Mr. Roussèvre artfully orchestrates a dream pageant that winds back and forth through time with remarkable clarity and a colorful cinematic sweep. "Love Songs" begins and ends with his characters milling in a faded ballroom filled with iconic dream figures like Isolde and an Aunt Jemima-style mammy: a ballroom whose majestic decrepitude is not unlike that of the Harvey Theater. "Love Songs" then moves to the park where most of the action takes place, peopled in part, unaccountably, by Seurat's "Grand Jatte" ladies, and doubles back again to the ballroom at the end.

The sleek staging is impressive, with Mr. Roussèvre appearing and merging into the crowd at just the right moments. The staging has a lyrical quality, too, that blends perfectly with the airily bounding, stretching dance that pushes through the text and drama from time to time.

characters, from his own shifting personas to the gay and straight lovers of the 1990's who could almost be the alter egos of Sarah and John. The performers of Mr. Roussèvre's Reality troupe are solid, affecting actors and dancers, particularly Charmaine Warren as Sarah and Julie Tolentino Wood as one of the lovers, childlike and feisty in turn.

But "Love Songs" is seriously undermined by the ways in which Mr. Roussèvre deals with its themes, principally that hoary theatrical staple of enduring love. He seems almost always to be at an emotional distance

A dream pageant from antebellum days to the 1990's.

from his material. His shifting characterizations, from garrulous back-country folk to a drawling urban crackhead and a child who has written a most unlikely love story, soon become gimmicky. There are moments when Mr. Roussèvre's storytelling verges on a deliberate sampling of contemporary dictums on race and sexuality, sometimes with enjoyable humor.

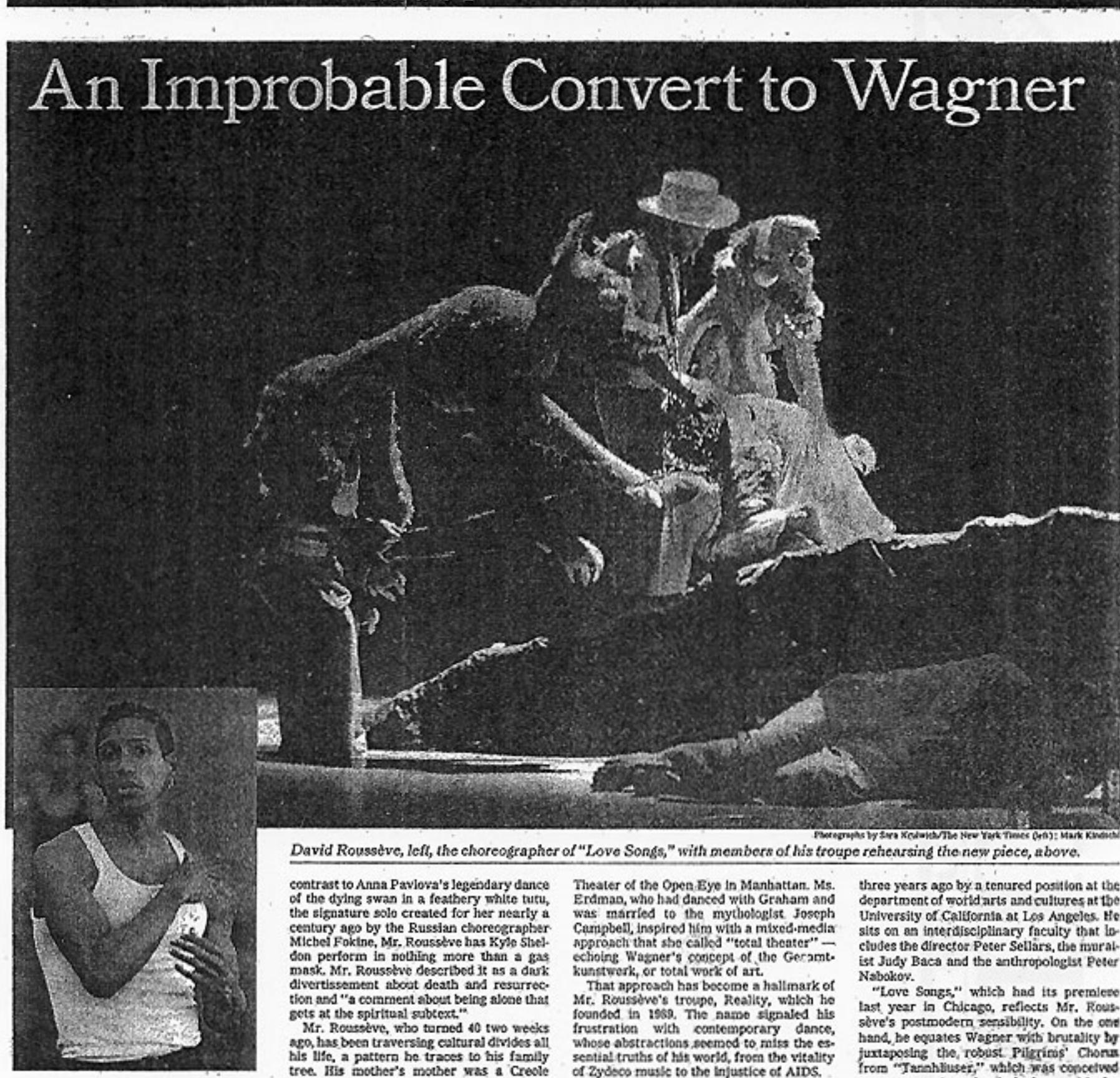
His use of themes by Wagner and Puccini, part of a smoothly flowing musical collage, gives the proceedings an extra grandeur. But the Wagner also allows Mr. Roussèvre to hide behind music of a scene-setting grandeur. You could shell pistachio nuts to "Tristan and Isolde" and have it look like heroic theater. It is hard to decide whether Mr. Roussèvre is being serious or ironic when he has a crippled, brutalized Sarah crawl slowly across the stage in a spotlight toward her suicidal, long-lost John, stabbing at himself in another spotlight, to the Liebestod. Either way, it doesn't work.

There are good moments that set this silliness in too bold relief. Most are physical images, like a passage of genuinely touching solo dancing, quietly internalized, by Mr. Roussèvre, and the simple reaching-up of John's arm into the light in the love-death scene. One is suddenly on solid ground.

The lead cast also included Ilaan Egeland, Terry Holliis, Kyle Sheldon and Steven Washington. Augmenting the cast were 20 performers from Brooklyn, among them a nicely innocent young Shakir Torbert as the little boy. Debby Lee Cohen designed the set, whose imaginative elements included three huge structures that served as ballroom windows, thrones and farm wagons. The costumes were by Carol Pelletier; the lighting was by Beverly Emmons.

"Love Songs" continues through tomorrow at the Harvey Lichtenstein Theater, 651 Fulton Street, Fort

An Improbable Convert to Wagner



Photographs by Sara Kociwich/The New York Times (left); Mark Kostich

David Roussève, left, the choreographer of "Love Songs," with members of his troupe rehearsing the new piece, above.

Joining his seven-member troupe is an ensemble of 21 local actors and dancers who flesh out a couple of scenes and give the piece an operatic scale. Mr. Roussève, who dances in several scenes, remains on stage throughout the production as the "narrator." But even in that role he takes on 16 different personae, ranging from homespun Southerners like Grady McRady and Aunt Ruby to an urban crackhead who takes his spiritual compass from "The Wizard of Oz."

The musical score is equally varied. Along with the Wagner, Mr. Roussève borrows parts of piano concertos from Chopin and Schumann, the Humming Chorus from Puccini's "Madama Butterfly" and — most boldly — the Swan section from Saint-Saëns's "Carnival of the Animals." In stark

contrast to Anna Pavlova's legendary dance of the dying swan in a feathery white tutu, the signature solo created for her nearly a century ago by the Russian choreographer Michel Fokine, Mr. Roussève has Kyle Sheldon perform in nothing more than a gas mask. Mr. Roussève described it as a dark divertissement about death and resurrection and "a comment about being alone that gets at the spiritual subtext."

Mr. Roussève, who turned 40 two weeks ago, has been traversing cultural divides all his life, a pattern he traces to his family tree. His mother's mother was a Creole maid who never finished first grade, while his father's father was a classical organist who earned a doctorate in history. Growing up in Houston, Mr. Roussève was bussed across town to integrated schools, where he was the only boy in his dance class.

Later, as an undergraduate at Princeton University, he vacillated between pursuing a career in the performing arts or civil rights law. He ended up writing his thesis on political theater in South Africa and, after graduating magna cum laude in 1981, set out for New York. Soap opera cameos and late-night paralegal work paid the rent until he joined Toronto Dance Theater, where he performed in expressionist pieces derived from the technique of Martha Graham.

Perhaps more influential, he said, was a stint just out of college with Jean Erdman's

Theater of the Open Eye in Manhattan. Ms. Erdman, who had danced with Graham and was married to the mythologist Joseph Campbell, inspired him with a mixed-media approach that she called "total theater" — echoing Wagner's concept of the *German-kunstwerk*, or total work of art.

That approach has become a hallmark of Mr. Roussève's troupe, Reality, which he founded in 1989. The name signaled his frustration with contemporary dance, whose abstractions seemed to miss the essential truths of his world, from the vitality of Zydeco music to the injustice of AIDS.

"**I**f the first rule for a writer is to write about what you know, then certainly that has to be true for a choreographer as well," Mr. Roussève said. For him, that meant exploring social issues and finding a credible way to combine high and low culture.

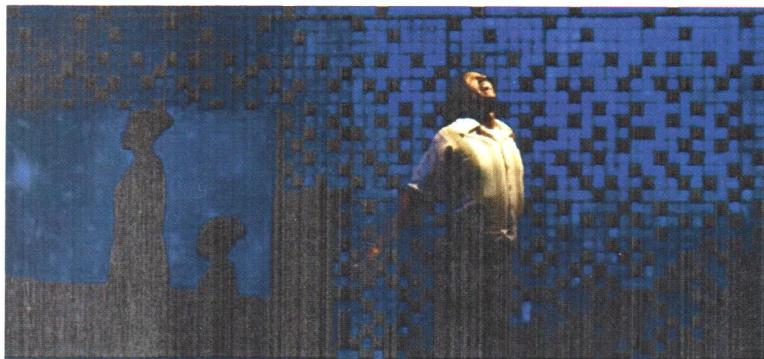
"I didn't want to create agitprop," he said. "I wanted to find a way to create work that was artistically viable and successful, but also spoke on a breadth of issues that addressed humanity. To do that, I think the work has to be vulnerable," by which he meant that it should honestly reflect the artist's emotional concerns and personal history.

After spending most of his adult life in New York, Mr. Roussève was lured away

three years ago by a tenured position at the department of world arts and cultures at the University of California at Los Angeles. He sits on an interdisciplinary faculty that includes the director Peter Sellars, the muralist Judy Baca and the anthropologist Peter Nabokov.

"*Love Songs*," which had its premiere last year in Chicago, reflects Mr. Roussève's postmodern sensibility. On the one hand, he equates Wagner with brutality by juxtaposing the robust Pilgrims' Chorus from "Tannhäuser," which was conceived as an evocation of saintly love, with the beastial image of Sarah being raped by her master. Later he drops the irony and admits his qualified admiration for the composer by using the Prelude from "Tristan" to depict John and Sarah's insatiable longing. And at the transcendent climax, the lovers reunite to the quintessentially erotic ana from "Tristan," the Liebestod.

"There is a lot of romanticism in the piece, but the chord that it strikes is agon and bittersweet," Mr. Roussève said. "The theme is that a little bit of compassion or love is what gets us through the muck, but certainly the piece also looks at the muck. I think it strikes a hopeful chord about the timelessness of what's essentially a dehumanizing existence."



"Roussèvre's dancers have modeled themselves on his physical courage, a willingness to push the body to extremes that reveals the ache of a restless soul"

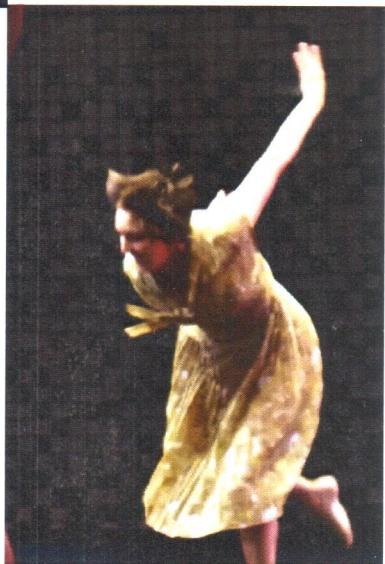
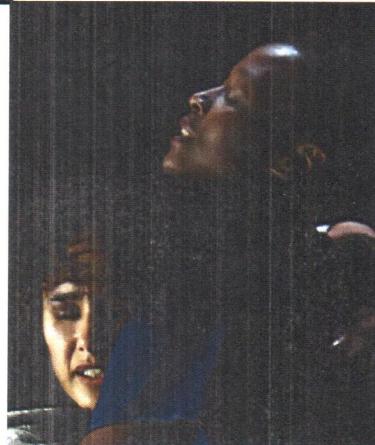
-The Village Voice

"David Roussèvre (is) one of this country's most inspired and inspiring dance makers."

- San Francisco Chronicle

"Shattering dance-theater"

-The New York Times



"...a call for grace, a cry to reunite with some large universal framework...inspired, ingenious work."

- Chicago Sun-Times



"Roussèvre binds humor and deep poignancy. I beg you all to go and see him, and become better, fuller, richer people."

-Time Out London