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## Peter DiMuro mixes genres with ‘Public Displays of Motion’ at Dance Place

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Peter DiMuro has been playing matchmaker with dancers and choreographers for what he calls “artistic speed dates.” The result: hip-hop meets modern dance, hula mingles with Sri Lankan, flamenco finds a friend in contemporary and Isadora Duncan style-dance mixes it up with post-modern.



Dancer Christopher K. Morgan in “Public Displays of Motion.” (Robert Gullen)

DiMuro calls it “Future Pre-ludes” and sees the project as the next big thing: a chance for artists from different worlds and diverse training to share what they know and to collaborate with someone in a dissimilar dance genre.

Ten days before this weekend’s Dance Place performances of “Public Displays of Motion,” DiMuro was unsure how it would turn out. The dancers won’t all come together until the night before opening. “We’ll just go for it,” he says with a laugh.

The thread the Cambridge, Mass.-based choreographer and artistic innovator is using to bind these seemingly disparate dance forms is the piano prelude — namely, many of the 24 preludes of Sergei Rachmaninoff. DiMuro was taken by the idea that classical musicians — just like modern, hip-hop and other cultural dancers — also improvise.

“I learned that when [Rachmaninoff] and other pianists of his time were warming up, they would improvise on the piano, which surprised me because I never think of classical musicians improvising,” says DiMuro, a former artistic director and dancer with Liz Lerman Dance Exchange.

“All of a sudden I was aware of improvisation in classical music. Then I read that Rachmaninoff was sampling from his own and other works. He was borrowing from other composers, from folk tunes from his culture and other cultures, and from himself. Basically Rachmaninoff was doing a mash-up, a fusion, and that’s what we often do in modern dance, too.”

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For “Future Preludes,” DiMuro plays the role of an impresario, matching artists and setting the blueprint for the final product; there’s no choreographer inventing steps. In the collaboration between modern and traditional hula dancer Christopher Morgan and Sri Lankan dancer Asanga Domask, they found as many similarities as differences.

Both dance forms, says Domask, who teaches Sri Lankan dance at CityDance Center in Bethesda, share a percussive base. “In Sri Lankan dance, there are times when [the movement] is very specific,” she says, “and times when it’s less specific and it’s more about stomping the ground.” Hula, too, uses percussive foot-stomping as its foundation.

The challenge, Morgan notes, was in finding the right Rachmaninoff prelude to accompany these two percussive forms. When Domask and Morgan shared their choices, both had selected Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in D Minor, Op. 23, No. 3. This became the basis for their work, “Meeting,” one of more than a dozen pieces by diverse dance artists performed as solos, duets or trios.

“Our languages are different,” says Domask, who noted that both hula and Sri Lankan dance use specific hand gestures to convey such words as earth, sky, water and flower. They started with different words performed in gesture and, as the work developed, combined their gestures, then their words. “In the middle of the piece, we are meeting, then we merge our movements together and we borrow from each other. Christopher learned my water [gesture] and I do his flowers,” she says.

“It’s very rare that you have the chance to get in the room with people who work in different genres,” DiMuro says.

“We’ll talk about our work,” he adds, “but we don’t get the chance to get down and do our work with each other. It’s not because we don’t trust each other, but just because we go back to what we know.

Traiger is a freelance writer.