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Grace in Motion Pictures

Few disciplines are less Zoom-friendly as a group activity than dance. Happily, the student dancers at UC Santa Barbara are some of the most flexible and adaptable people around.

Which explains how the UCSB Dance Company is able to present “In Flight & On Film,” a video celebration of dance that will screen via Zoom Thursday, April 29, at 6 p.m.

Consisting of three works by guest choreographers, the film reflects the dancers’ determination to showcase their skills in a year when the pandemic lockdown put the kibosh on the 20 to 30 shows they’d usually perform, said Delila Moseley, artistic director of the company.

“When we were informed that there would be no live performances possible in fall 2020 and then winter 2021 and then spring 2021,” she said, “I wanted to give the students *something* to be a part of where they could show their dancing.”

The three films — “Pop,” “Effort of Hope” and “Ride” — were made under challenging conditions. As Moseley recounted, the student dancers learned three pieces of choreography over Zoom, rehearsing three days a week at home and two in the campus studio while socially distanced.

“One choreographer was Zooming in from New York, so never met in person,” she said. “The other Zooming in from Santa Barbara, but still never in person. The first time the dancers were all together was when we met at Elings Park to film the piece

outdoors. We were not allowed to film indoors, as the videographer was not able to be in the studio and the dancers could not be in a large group indoors."

For performers who rely on timing, Zoom is a bit of nightmare. The time lag, Moseley noted, makes it hard for dancers in different spaces to stay together with the music, and the small spaces made it hard to move and perform the choreography accurately.

"It is very hard to work on nuances, on expression, on artistry, on timing," she said. "The dancers and choreographers faced a monumental task, in my opinion, and came through beautifully."

"Pop" was choreographed by New York-based Caili Quan and set to the music of Barbatuques. It was created at DanceWorks Chicago's ChoreoLab.

"Effort of Hope" was choreographed by Gianna Burright, an alumna of UCSB and the UCSB Dance Company. She holds an MFA in choreography from Trinity Laban Conservatory of Music and Dance. She worked collaboratively with the dancers to create her piece.

"Ride," by Joshua Manculich, was created before the pandemic, but still had to be learned by the dancers over Zoom. Moved by Julia Wolfe's pulsating score, the piece pushes the dancers to the brink of their athletic prowess.

The films were shot by videographer Samsun Keithley, who Moseley called "very enthusiastic and involved in the project."

"He was intuitive and sensitive in his approach to the filming," she said. "The filming was the fun part — the editing was time-consuming and challenging. Again, Samsun was in tune with what I and the choreographers were trying to achieve."

Moseley said that while she's pleased with the project, "and I enjoyed being involved in a different medium, I have no desire to see dance on film replace live dance performances. Maybe co-exist at times, but live dance performance is an irreplaceable magical experience."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.