

Hardenbergh choreographs a dance celebrating the summer solstice near the upper St. Anthony Falls lock and dam on the Mississippi River, performed in '85 and '90.

Marylee Hardenbergh sees the world through dance-colored glasses. "Machines dance. Getting on the bus can be a dance. Any human movement could be a dance." Her work has been termed environmental dancing, contemporary cosmology, and urban choreography. Aware of a spiritual component in her works, she perceives the performers as conduits bridging energies between heaven and earth. "Our bones conduct electro-magnetic activity. Basically, we are all hair follicles on the planet," said Hardenbergh. "However, my dances are primarily about rhythm, color, harmony, and most importantly the beauty of movement. If people get a spiritual message, all the better."

Hardenbergh's creative process and use of unusual elements in choreography define her inimitable style. First and foremost, her dances are site specific, outdoors and often amidst person-made structures. For example, fairy figures danced atop cement moors in the middle of the Mississippi River for *Solstice Falls on Friday* (see photo). She chooses astronomic and festive dates such as full moons, equinoxes and Beltane. *Urban Sky Harvest* celebrated the 29-year occurrence of a full moon on the solstice. During preliminary on-site meditations, she assesses a space's energy, considering the spectators' position in relation to the sun and moon. Quite often her pieces incorporate machinery such as cherry pickers or barges. Events are free to the public, who are then invited to tune into their portable radios, providing a musical backdrop for the performers.

For Hardenbergh, her dances are community rituals, marking a passage



Marylee Hardenbergh plays with different fabrics near the Spoon Bridge and The Cherry in Walker Art Center's sculpture garden.

of time together by reviving ancient festivals. They reach into spectators' hearts, connecting them to a site, which in turn is linked to the heavens. Conceivably a vibrational change in the location occurs. Spectators have remarked, "Downtown is no longer such an unfriendly place to me..." and after six years, "Every time I cross that bridge, I still see the performance happening." One woman called Hardenbergh to thank her "...for giving the Mississippi River back to the people."

And people do transform. Skeptical construction workers, who had never been to theater before, were snared into can-canning with front-end loaders. But by the last performance, they wanted to go on tour and remarked, "This art stuff isn't so bad!" Similarly artisans have bubbled, "I had no idea that these machines could move so gracefully!"

Contingent upon a grant, Hardenbergh could expand her craft to address major environmental issues. She aspires to visit the Shetland Islands and choreograph movement choirs, large orchestrated moving groups, comprised of guilds affected by the oil spill: farmers of salmon, sheep and vegetables. An inner kernel of nine dancers would represent the countries involved in the disaster: Norway, the tanker's country of origin; Canada, its destiny; the United States, its owner; Liberia, its registrar; and each of Great Britain's nations. The event would aid in healing the Shetland community by providing a medium to tell their stories and would redirect world attention on the spill for its one year anniversary. Perhaps Hardenbergh is evolving a planetary dance.

More about Marylee Hardenbergh: She holds a Masters Degree in therapy and is a licensed social worker. As a dance therapist, she enables people to experience their bodies as an entry point to spiritual and psychological health. "My clients can release old wounds through movement, accepting their bodies just as they are, listening to the body's wisdom. If we don't listen, our bodies tend to yell a little louder!" If you would like to contact her for dance therapy and body work, call 612-332-0278.

About the author: White Ash, while in Bologna, Italy, was searching for a Wiccan name. He learned that women there in the past immersed white ashes into their wash water which purifies clothing to a brilliant white without harming the earth.

Hardenbergh choreographs dances for environment

White Ash

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