



A R T I S T

Marylee Hardenbergh

By Sara Parker

Christo trailed a loose fence of white nylon, a "ribbon of light," over the California hills and skirted Florida islands in pink tarpaulin. Robert Smithson, the leader of a movement called Earth Art, molded land into shapes and photographed them from the air. Marylee Hardenbergh, a Minneapolis choreographer, has a similar regard for the exterior world and its possibilities as an artist's palette.

As Hardenbergh drives around the Twin Cities, she imagines dancers gracing window frames of elegant art deco buildings or moving in ways to echo the lines of glassy skyscrapers. To her, dance and architecture have become inextricably linked, each contributing something to the other. She says: "I enjoy pulling two things together. One is the passing of the seasons and the other is combining dance and architecture; using the building as a stage."

Hardenbergh's piece *Kinetic Cromlech* (1983) was a product of time spent in Scotland, where she explored an interest in mysterious stone circles like Stonehenge. In the piece, dancers vary steps and rhythms in the formation of a square, meant to represent a collection of standing stones. Because of the piece's visual nature and its attention to pattern, a friend suggested that it be performed in the indoor court at Landmark Center in St. Paul, where balconies surround an open space, providing multi-level viewing.

The success of this idea inspired Hardenbergh to make dances for other spaces, environmental and architectural. In late 1984, Hardenbergh decided that the Mississippi River presented an ideal setting for a dance. But it took some convincing before others shared her vision. She remembers taking the lockmaster to lunch at the Fuji-Ya, and with a view of the river they discussed her idea of performing a dance near the lock and dam. Though skeptical at first, he quickly took an interest in the project. Hardenbergh wrote up a lengthy proposal and then three months later, the Army Corps of Engineers gave the go-ahead. On June 21, 1985, the first day of summer, nine dancers in pink and purple costumes performed *Solstice Falls on Friday*, on the mooring cells in the river. Thousands of people lined the bridge, tuning in Walkmans and boomboxes to a local station broadcasting the piece's music by David Means, a Minneapolis composer. Hardenbergh notes enthusiastically that this method of bringing the music to the onlookers was probably one of her best ideas.

In 1987 Hardenbergh decided to stage a dance on one of Minneapolis' newest buildings, the Opus Building on Fifth Street and Marquette. She wanted to emphasize its horizontal and vertical rhythms as well as its rounded qualities, by creating a dance placing eighteen dancers on three of the building's balconies. She brought photographs of the building to St. Paul Composer Miriam Gerberg, who composed an electronic piece from her interpretation of its lines and shapes.

Performed on May 1-2, 1987, the piece, titled *Opus on a May Morning* heralded the Spring Equinox. Though the days were rainy, people watched from the plaza in front on the building and from skyways and nearby office buildings, again with Walkmans and boomboxes. Yellow, red and purple banners, symbolizing the sun and fire were draped over the top of the structure and dancers unfurled a Maypole at the end of the piece.

Hardenbergh is very interested in the role of pattern in dance and the visual qualities of the art form. New York Choreographer Laura Dean who creates dances featuring patterns on continuous spinning is one of Hardenbergh's favorites. She says: "There's something very mesmerizing about the spinning and the repetition of the patterns." Irmagard Bartenieff, Hardenbergh's mentor and the woman responsible for bringing Laban Movement Analysis to the United States from Central Europe, emphasized the significance of repetitive movement in her teaching. She also believed that the numbers of dancers used effects the feeling and quality of a piece.

A certified movement analyst and dance therapist with Abbott Northwestern Hospital, Hardenbergh concentrates on helping people get in touch with what their bodies are saying and learn to physically express their internal selves. When she is free to make dances, she prefers to concentrate on having dancers interact with the external world: "I'm more interested in getting dancers in a space and saying, 'Okay, react to the external space, rather than the internal.'"

To Hardenbergh, the power of dance lies in its capacity to effect the audience. Dancers create a mood that has a ripple effect on the audience. "Dance can express feelings, but it can also produce feelings," she says. Hardenbergh's dances transform spaces. Shortly after the river piece, Hardenbergh received a phone call from a woman who said "Thanks for bringing the river back to the people." ▼

P R O F I L E S



Solstice Falls on Friday choreographed by Marylee Hardenbergh

Photo: Jim Treips