

One River Mississippi

Report from the Artistic Director

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onerivermississippi.org

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Note from the Artistic Director

Greetings!

In the past 30 days, many of us traveled many miles to connect with each other. We continue to edge through the process of getting permission to put dancers and audiences on bridges, banks, buildings, and boats. At the same time, we have a broad base of support in the seven different sites.

It is amazing to think that the performance will take place in four months. We have an astounding crew along the river, from publicists to project managers to choreographers. Not to mention all of the help from officials such as the city police and the US Army Corps of Engineers who have given us permission to place dancers on locks and dams in Minneapolis and the Quad Cities. I am bursting with excitement as everything falls into place.

Marylee Hardenbergh



At work during the St. Louis Summit



Itasca

Twin Cities

Quad Cities

St. Louis

E. St. Louis

Memphis

New Orleans

Plaquemines
Parish



Choreographers' Summit in St. Louis

Each and every one of our choreographers descended on St. Louis for our second summit. These summits are essential. Each of you readers knows that in the physical presence of other humans, you change. When we choreographers meet in person, we not only become more coherent as a team, we also dance together. Our coherence will take physical form during the performance. All of the performers up and down the river will move the same way to the same music for the last four minutes of the performance. To accomplish that, we must work second by second, and we can only do that together, in person.

The St. Louis crew warmly welcomed us. We ate delicious food, held many discussions, and worked very hard both in the studios and at the St. Louis performance site. My favorite story I can blame on our publicists, who insisted we could not leave St Louis without some beautiful press photos.

So we were all instructed to take off our coats, shoes and socks and lie down on the cold, cold, cobblestones for a photo shoot. Yes, we could feel the cold and we had no sun, but the forecasts were predicting snow and even colder temperatures the next day. We succumbed to the wisdom of “do it now,” and you see a striking photo of us (trying not to look the way we felt -- frreeeezing) on the banks of the Mississippi. Naturally the next two days were warmer and sunnier, but we now have photos with great atmosphere.



Cold on the Cobbles

My choreographers are all amazing women. Each is accomplished and competent. Some run departments in universities; some head up their own dance companies or businesses. All worked hard and we ended the summit on an upbeat note: holding a press conference. Warm thanks to our hosts: Project Managers Cathy Davis and Loryl Breitenbach , and Choreographers Sarah Anne Patz and Beckah Voigt.

Red Tape and Good Luck

As an example of community involvement and all the behind the scenes preparation needed, let’s look at the permission meeting in St. Louis, the day before we had the dance summit (see above). Over a year ago, we submitted requests to the City of St. Louis to close the Eads Bridge, where the audience will stand.



Eads Bridge

This was not a one-page letter, but a three-page detailed form required by the St. Louis Board of Public Service. And, get this, we had to prove to the Board that we had notified 14 other agencies, such as the Illinois State Highway Patrol. Before this permission meeting, many of us had put in hours of work to plow through the red tape.

Our good luck: we have Lieutenant Tony Russo of the St. Louis Police Department, with his assistant Brent Feig, to help the project managers and choreographers in navigating through all that red tape. At the permission meeting, Tony put everyone at ease with his “can-do” attitude. He is on our side, and he believes that we will in fact be able to close the one city street needed for the performers on the west bank.

Tony also helped us with the dance site, on the river bank. In downtown St. Louis, all the river banks are paved with cobblestones, and the space is leased to a parking company. People actually park on these banks! We need a space 300 feet wide and 300 feet long to dance on, and the parking company, to which Tony directed us, has graciously permitted us to use such a space.



If, that is, we get through more red tape. We have to insure the parking company against any damages, and obtain indemnification documents for the parking company. Having Tony and Brent's positive energy helps everyone to get through these picky, but necessary, details.

St. Louis Crew

*Back row L to R: Brent Feig, Loryl Breitenbach, Tony Russo
Front row L to R: Sarah Anne Patz, Beckah Voigt, Cathy Davis*

Friend-Raising Trip

Another trip! In early February, dance patron and Ernie Award recipient Sage Cowles added wonderful zest to a "Friend-Raising" whirlwind trip to St. Louis and Memphis with me. Great exuberance bubbled out of our gatherings in both cities. In St. Louis, our gathering was held at Linda Riekes' beautiful house. On her dining room table was a stunning centerpiece interpreting the Mississippi River. We were glad to meet movers and shakers there.



Sage visiting Andrea at her studio

Two of them, Andrea Smythe and Sara Burke, spoke about the importance of bringing East St Louis (in Illinois) together with St. Louis (in Missouri). They quoted Katherine Dunham, a famous modern dancer who made her home in East St. Louis, as saying: "The Mississippi River here in St. Louis is not a river. It is an ocean."

The next morning, Sage and I drove past the famous arch and across the river from St. Louis to East St. Louis. There we visited Andrea's gorgeous dance studios and talked about One River with Andrea, a certified Dunham technique teacher. Andrea's spirit is strong and beautiful, and we are lucky to

have her as part of the project. She will spearhead the Illinois (meaning East St. Louis) section of the dance, and bring her Dunham colleagues into the performance.

Then Sage and I went off to Memphis, to a meeting at The Pier, a restaurant that looks right out onto our "stage" of cobblestones, the Memphis Queen and Mud Island, with another effervescent group who came up with wonderful ideas. Sage's sister's friend, Dr. Ruth Williams, came, as did several people from the Church Health Center, where our choreographer Kimberly Baker also works. There were definitely more than a couple of human tornadoes at our gathering. Wow! What energy!

About One River Mississippi

The One River Mississippi newsletters provides updates about our project, which encompasses seven simultaneous performances in seven venues along the river.

This public art event, which is free and open to the public, has gained a timeliness and a new sense of commitment given the recent devastation downriver. The performances will create a sense of the interconnectedness that goes beyond one's immediate local environment to encompass an entire ecosystem.

The peoples of this ecosystem who come to the performance, and who act in it, will have the opportunity to work together to honor the "One River" that spans our nation, through the tools of art, ecology, and community awareness.



In St. Louis, choreographers join hands to create One River Mississippi

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This project is presented as a collaboration between Global Site Performance and Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education, which is committed to environmental and community building efforts.