

# One River Mississippi

## Report from the Artistic Director

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[onerivermississippi.org](http://onerivermississippi.org)

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### Note from the Artistic Director

I have been so happy these past few weeks, as many of the pieces of this meandering puzzle fell into place.

We are gathering lots of beautiful steam at all of our sites. Dancers have started rehearsing. We have agreed upon the precise timing of the simulcasts of our synchronized choreography.

Amazingly, the performance on which we have worked for four years is only three months away.

*Marylee Hardenbergh*

### One Season to Go

As spring officially begun last week, I know that we are one season away from our event, which takes place in the beginning of the summer. These three months comprise a quarter of a year, the turning of the season. When next the season turns, we will be in the wings, waiting to go onstage and to bring to all of you, dear readers, our performance.

*"In fact, we are creating the largest site-specific dance performance in history!!"*

We have been working to weave in our three elements of art, ecology and community. The artists, our choreographers, are especially happy at the news that our synchronizing music is completed. The composition, written by Lee Blaske especially for this dance, is winging its way via the wonder of CD technology to all of the seven sites as you read these words.

Our teams of environmentalists, project managers, and community organizers are harmonizing. We are going to make a splash. In fact, we are creating the largest site-specific dance performance in history!!



Itasca

Twin Cities

Quad Cities

St. Louis

E. St. Louis

Memphis

New Orleans

Plaquemines

Parish



## United We Flow

In addition to the beauty of the performance at each site, and the attention to the Mississippi River, the connection that will happen between the sites is very important. It will help our River for the nation to understand that we are not 10 separate states, each with a separate river. No. We are one large River community. As we all comprehend this, we gain the energy to agree on decisions that affect the River.

For example, on one bank of the River, one state may limit pollutants seeping into the river. But 100 miles down the River, the state on the opposite bank may permit more dumping into the river. The limits of one state upstream are negated by the lack of limits downstream.



*We are one large River community.*

## Sites Sing to Each Other

When people hear about the nation-spanning celebration, they are most thrilled by the chance for each audience to call to each other, and to hear the responses from the other audiences. How will this happen?

At 7:12 PM, each of the seven audiences will start connecting using audio engineering, phone lines, and big speakers. Each site will rehearse by calling out “One Mississippi” in Itasca; then “Two Mississippi” in the next site; and so on until we hear “Seven Mississippi”. Then precisely at 7:15 PM over simulcast radio stations, the audiences will create a chord together. Itasca will start singing one note, Minneapolis, while hearing Itasca, will add the next note, and so on until we can hear the chord with all seven notes sounding together.



*Then the site-specific performances begin.*

Then the site-specific performances begin. In the second half, as described below, we will become one River-wide performance. At the end of the dancing, with the radio stations still together, we will hear the clapping from all sites; and then we will once more make the chord River-wide. Following that, all of the audiences will engage in a post-performance “meet and greet,” which will be led in a playful manner by a professional dance/movement therapist.

## What Exactly Is “Site” in This Site-Specific Performance?

Site-specific dance is by definition created for one particular site. The music, the costumes, the movements are informed by the site’s physical aspects, or its history, or by the people who frequent that place.

The One River Mississippi performance has hit upon a very interesting phenomenon: each site has its own unique character while at the same time each site is part of one vast site, the Mississippi River. Therefore, in the first half of the performance, each site will reflect its own individual stretch of the river, featuring music by local composers and singers, such as Miles Davis from St. Louis, Johnny Cash from Memphis, and Bix Beiderbecke from the Quad Cities. Local choreographers choose what music to use for their individual site.



*Disk opened to full five feet*

In the second half of the performance, everyone — all seven sites - will hear the same music. It consists of a short medley comprised of the seven local music selections, and a commissioned score written especially for this performance and addressing the entire length of the Mississippi River. The original music starts with a bow to the Native American flute sounds; later it addresses the industrial aspects of the working river, and it teases us with a hint of the jazz, which was spawned along the Great Muddy.

Thus as the artistic aspects of the dance are starting to gel, we see that the dance as a whole starts out with totally different elements, and flavors. Then during the river-wide music that takes place during the second half, each site will gradually merge with the others to become one united front. These river-wide aspects include one common prop: three circular disks at each site. These disks are light and malleable and pop out to a diameter of 5 feet, or can be shrunk down to a diameter of half that size. Since we have seven sites, we are using the seven colors of the rainbow. At the source of the river in Itasca, the three disks will be red; Minneapolis has orange; Quad Cities yellow; St. Louis green; blue, indigo and violet go to Memphis, New Orleans and Plaquemines Parish respectively.

At the finale, we invite each human at all seven sites to join in uniting the River by a simple and elegant arm gesture. All of the performers and all of the celebrants will perform synchronized arm motions, connecting our hearts to the river and also “rolling on down the river” so that we actually feel the Mississippi as one Whole River.

As a choreographer, then, I would describe first part of the performance as site-specific to each of the seven places, and the second part as site-specific to the entire site, the entire River.

## Why 7 PM?

Who knew that all of our cities are in the same time zone? I did not until we began planning our choreographers’ long-distance conference calls a few years ago. The time of the sunset varies between our sites, and not because of any difference in the clocks.



*Disks at half size*

Take a look at these sunset times for June 24:

- 9:20 PM in Itasca
- 9:03 PM in Minneapolis
- 8:40 PM in the Quad Cities
- 8:29 PM in St. Louis
- 8:18 PM in Memphis
- 8:05 PM in New Orleans
- 8:02 PM in our Plaquemines Parish site

There are more than 17 degrees latitude between our northernmost and southernmost site. You'll notice that the sun sets later as one moves upriver. If the Mississippi extended to the Arctic Circle, we would have no sunset at all, and find ourselves in the 'land of the midnight sun'. Fortunately, we are far enough south to get the beauty of the sunset for our performance.

Since this form of site-specific art always uses natural lighting, the lighting design differs every time. The light at the end of the day is a rosier light, and we wanted to finish at all sites before the sun went down.

So we end before sunset in Louisiana, though in Itasca the sun remains up for more than one hour!

### Performance Day

While most of our sites are starting their events at 7 PM, some start earlier to accommodate their site-specific activities. In New Orleans, the event is beginning with a "second line dance," a time-honored tradition in that city. Itasca is planning some pre-event activities such as a Biking Dance performed by the Biking Club, announcing their local art contest winners, and also allowing for the dance-goers to purchase their vehicle permits in order to enter the Itasca State Park and head down to the headwaters parking lot.



*Louisiana sunset*

At every site local groups will make available environmental information, including what it takes to become a better steward of the River.

### National Postcard

We are putting the final touches on the National Postcard. This soon-to-be-mailed piece has the key information for our audience at each site:

- what One River Mississippi celebrates,
- directions on how to get to the site,
- the local music they have chosen,
- the local radio station,

AND an exultation about how everyone at the performance will participate in 'the world's largest site-specific performance'!

## About One River Mississippi

The One River Mississippi newsletter 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.

For complete information on the entire project, visit our website: <http://onerivermississippi.org>

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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.**