

One River Mississippi

Report from the Artistic Director

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Note from the Artistic Director

Welcome to the third issue of our One River Mississippi Newsletter. As you know, we will be sending out these newsletters to update you 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 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.

During these winter months we have been as busy as beavers, working on a nuts and bolts level, but also beginning to dip into luscious artistic decisions. For example, we are getting insurance for the different buildings, parks, boats and structures on which there will be dancers, and we are also beginning to address such performance issues as fabric and costumes.



Kerry St. Pe and Janice Buras at the temporary offices of the Plaquemines Parish President

In early January, I flew down to Louisiana. Kerry accompanied Angela and me to Plaquemines Parish. In



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Plaquemines Parish: We have a site!

Our southernmost site has a new location! As you know, Fort Jackson in Plaquemines Parish was chosen before the hurricanes and is still underwater.

Last December our Venice choreographer, Angela Hammerli, spoke with the Director of the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, Kerry St. Pe.

Serendipitously, Kerry grew up in Plaquemines Parish, and he recommended the historic Woodland Plantation, involved for centuries with the river.

order to drive south of Woodland, we needed to get special permission from the president of Plaquemines Parish. We stopped in and visited with Janice Buras at the parish president's office, who said that she and her friends in the Red Hat Ladies might be interested in being part of the performance! A fabulous idea!



Two photos of Angela merged into one -- testing the possibilities for dancers on the levee



Start of performance will be on the porches of Woodland.

Who knows? One of the freighters may even grace the performance with their presence. And graceful they are: huge, but they move beautifully and majestically as they go out to the Atlantic, or up to the Port of New Orleans to offload their wares.

So our site #7 has a home, and the performance in Plaquemines Parish will be stunning. Everyone who works at Woodland, and especially Foster, is very excited by the possibilities of this national project. They welcome us with that famous Southern charm.



Big ships go by Woodland.

on both sides of the river, as do the levees. The destruction in Plaquemines is indescribable, viewed in person. I didn't have the heart to take photos of it.

After looking at some other sites along the river, we knew Woodland was our site. Some other neat aspects of Woodland: it is the farthest point south with electricity, phones, and running water. On the front lawn, it has a cypress tree, the pride and joy of Foster Creppel who runs the bed and breakfast. The tree qualifies as a Louisiana Purchase Cypress Legacy cypress, since it has lived over 200 years old.

Foster is hosting the crew that is restoring the levee breached there. The crew is adding height as they work, making the height of the new levee about two feet higher than the old one.

Over the last eight years, the owners have restored the buildings on the property to an incredible standard of beauty. Angela became inspired by the porches of the main house, and intends to start the performance there. The audience will move from the house up to the levee, and for the finale, have a great vantage point to view the river and the batture. (Learn about battures below)



Woodland Legacy Cypress and Foster Creppel, owner, manager, chef, and construction supervisor



PS: I also learned what a batture is, and when I arrived back in Minneapolis I looked it up in a formidable dictionary. I like that it even mentions the Mississippi: "batture--the alluvial land between a river at low water stage and a levee, especially used of such land along the lower Mississippi River."

PPS: Woodland lies on the west bank. I wanted to see our site from east bank, and got to use the free ferry service near the Plaquemines Parish president's office. The parish runs

New Orleans: High and dry

During my January trip to Plaquemines, I also visited the site in New Orleans. I got the opportunity to watch a rehearsal at the site led by choreographer Barbara Hayley.



Our New Orleans site: The old Orange Street Wharf



View upriver in New Orleans. Our site lies near the two smokestacks.

The dancers are the finest New Orleans has to offer – they have been far flung for months, and are very excited to see each other, especially for a dancing gig. The cruise ship (see photo) provides temporary housing for Tulane University faculty and staff; it will be gone in May. The concrete blocks will also be gone; they were erected as a wind barrier for a few people who weathered out the storm right on our site.

Barbara also arranged for a lunch where I was able to meet our two fabulous Project Managers, Janet Spencer and Lyn Caliva. They make quite a team.

The director of Riversphere, John McLachlan, also joined us, at a just-re-opened restaurant which provided a wonderful meal.

John described how he and several others who work together at the Center for Bioenvironmental Research (CBR) at Tulane and Xavier Universities (our site on the river is the future site of Riversphere, which is a project of the CBR) really liked the word to “re-inhabit” New Orleans rather than to “rebuild”. To him, “rebuild” applied to levees, while “re-inhabit” shows that humans are living there again.

Choreographers Summit Jan. 27-29 in St. Louis

In just a few days, all of the choreographers will hold a summit in St. Louis, where we deepen our connection, and finalize our unison moves. The project is really taking shape, especially now that we have nailed down our last site. Reports from all of our contacts in the seven sites say that people who hear about the project are amazed! It is a colossal site at which to hold a site-specific dance, this Mississippi River, but we are actually feeling as if we are bringing the awareness that this is indeed one river.

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