

DANCE

Multimedia exploration of creative process

By Mary Ellen Hunt

How do you embody the internal life of the choreographic process? Bebe Miller's latest work, "A History," which her company performs this weekend at the Forum at Yerba Buena Center, takes on what drives the creative process and how to capture and document the essence of a work.

Miller says the idea for the project arose out of conversations with Talvin Wilks, her longtime dramaturge, and veteran dancers Angie Hauser and Darrell Jones, who have performed with Bebe Miller Company for more than a decade, about what really drives their work.

"We were talking about the fact that we feel we are in this for the process," Miller says. "It's the continuing creative conversation that really pulls us in. Audiences see the finished product, which is only one aspect at one time of a longer conversation, but they don't get to see everything that goes into making that particular piece. You know, we keep on talking and problem solving and continue to carry the thread forward constantly."

At the same time, Miller, 62, says talk of archiving dance has come up more than once.

"Maybe it's because so many of us are older in the field," she says in a phone conversation from the Pacific Northwest, where she is on sabbatical from Ohio State

University. "Archivists and librarians control the tone of what an archive is — costumes, programs and all of those tangibles. But we started to ask, would there be a way to archive the process itself, to bring forward some of those conversations, the different perspectives that we all had in the making of a work?"

Initially conceived as an interactive, Web-based archive, the idea took on its own life, and Miller says she and her collaborators found themselves creating a new work about the act of looking at the past — a kind of embodied archive.

It's a tricky balance for "A History," which layers live performance by Hauser and Jones and video by Lily Skove and an installation by Maya Ciarrocchi, in a multimedia exploration that Miller hopes will draw the audience into the visceral experience of creating a dance.

"We aren't trying to give a blow-by-blow of the work — that's kind of boring," she laughs. "Instead, we asked



Julietta Cervantes / Bebe Miller Company

Dancers Darrell Jones and Angie Hauser of the Bebe Miller Company, Miller and dramaturge Talvin Wilks all live in different cities but have figured out a way to work together.



Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

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Angie and Darrell, what is it that you do? What is this 'Angie-ness' thing? What in your movement vocabulary is the essence of you? And we tried to identify how they intersected with each other —

Bebe Miller's "A History":

Friday-Saturday, Bebe Miller Company, YBCA Forum, 701 Mission St., S.F. \$20-\$30. (415) 978-2787. www.ybca.org.

not just as dancers. They were good friends long before they met me. So a really interesting question for me is, how much of what they do onstage is their relationship and how much is choreography?"

History, and reflection on that history, are intertwined in the work, Miller observes, noting that two duets Hauser and Jones have performed together — "Landing/Place" (2005) and "Verge" (2001) — served as a jumping-off point.

"Angie wrote a beautiful essay about performing the 'Landing/Place' duet with Darrell. The language from that surfaces several times in 'A History,'" she explains. "We get to know what she saw and felt, and her telling of the moment spurred Lily to create a video, not of the performance moment, but of Angie's image of the moment."

Miller speaks of her 27-year-old company as following

a 21st century model: Miller, Wilks, Hauser and Jones all live in different cities, a result of their evolving personal and professional lives. In order to work together, they've developed a process that allows for some remote exchange of ideas, then an intensive rehearsal process when they can schedule time to be in the same room.

"For me it's definitely worthwhile figuring out, how can we keep on working together?" Miller says. "So we've come up with strategies that involve heavily scored improvisation. We've found that our form is really dependent on exchange of live moment, and I've learned to trust that to tell the story. I feel strongly that it becomes less about repeating exactly what they did the night before, and more about staying inside a very well-understood and formalized score to come up with that exhilarating live moment between them."

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