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'Plateau' performance brings dancers' words to life at Oakland University

The Oakland University Repertory Dance Company will present *Plateau* on March 23-24 in the atrium of the Engineering Center on the campus of Oakland University. The piece, choreographed by Associate Professor of Dance Thayer Jonutz, features musical accompaniment by the OU guitar studio, as well as poetry from theatre student Mickey Mcglinnen.

"Ever since the Engineering Center was built and I walked into the atrium for the first time, I dreamed of putting on a dance concert there," said Jonutz, who is also the director of the OU Repertory Dance Company. "I didn't know what it would look like, when it would happen or how it would happen, but I knew I wanted to do it."

Jonutz also found inspiration for the performance in an unlikely place.

"I was driving around when the word 'plateau' popped into my head," he said. "I had no idea what it meant, so I started researching it on the Internet and at the library. I found the literal definition of a landscape plateau, but I also found a lot of information about performance plateaus and what that means for athletes and what it means psychologically for human beings in terms of stress, trauma, relationships, careers, etc. That really intrigued me and I knew what direction I wanted to head in."

Jonutz shared his research with his students in the OU Repertory Dance Company and had them share a time in their own lives when they felt they had hit a plateau as part of a nonstop freewriting exercise.

"It could've been something current, a decade ago, last year, whatever," Jonutz said. "But it had to be a time in their life where they felt stuck, and what they did to break out of that feeling, that state of plateau. As a result, I saw in their writings a range of emotions and situations. Some of them even described feeling like they were going crazy because of all the demands of school work, family, etc. that were all happening at once. I felt like I was really privileged to read what they had written because they really didn't filter themselves or hold anything back."

Inspired by the students' writings, Jonutz reached out to Bret Hoag, director of the Oakland University Guitar Ensemble; Kerro Knox 3, associate professor of theatre; and Christa Koe costume shop supervisor; to collaborate on the *Plateau* project.

"It's not easy to collaborate with so many different artists that have their own voice, that have their own craft," Jonutz said. "But on the other hand, it's incredibly rewarding and helpful. It's challenging, it's vulnerable and it's scary because you don't really know how the end product is going to turn out, but I love it and that's why I do it. I love the result of it, even though it's uncertain. I could've never imagined this piece would come out like this when I started working on it, but I'm thrilled with the end result. It's become a sum of all the parts, pieces and minds that have come together to put this performance on."

As part of the collaborative process, Jonutz also reached out to Kathleen Pfeiffer, a professor of English at OU, who put him in touch with Mickey Mcglinnen, an English major and theatre student.

"Mickey took their writing and came back with a short poem for each dancer, almost like a haiku," Jonutz said. "It was succinct and a perfect encapsulation of the dancers' writings and their feelings. When I read them, I thought they were amazing and I wanted to find a way to incorporate them into the performance."

For Mcglinnen, the process of turning the students' essays into poetry was a rewarding challenge.



The Oakland University Repertory Dance Company will present Plateau on March 24 in the atrium of the Engineering Center on the campus of Oakland University. (Photos courtesy JLBoone Photography)



from an external observer; I figured it would be more powerful and make more sense if I tried to write from the stance of each dancer.”

Mcglinnen said Jonutz was “incredibly supportive” during the collaborative process.

“I’m incredibly thankful he reached out to me to do the project,” Mcglinnen said. “It gave me a perspective and experience I’ve never had with writing before, and I think it helped expand my capacity for interpretation of other peoples’ works. The choice to have each dancer speak their poem coincided really well with the process I had to create each of the poems. Overall, this project pushed my creative abilities, and I’m really excited to see it come to life.”

Plateau will be performed at 8 p.m. on Friday, March 23 and Saturday, March 24 in the atrium of the Engineering Center, which is located at 111 Library Drive. Each performance will last approximately 60 minutes. Donations will be accepted and all proceeds from the event will benefit OU dance students who will be traveling to Berlin later this year as part of the study abroad program.