



Dance Initiative Residences Put Carbondale's Launchpad on the Map

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Molissa Fenley
and CoMotion;
photo by
Deborah Colley

With a catch in her voice, Alya Howe acknowledged that a dancer's life is often a struggle to survive. "As an artist, it's rare to be given studio and financial support to develop, share and present your work. My residency at the Launchpad gave me the opportunity to work with my craft, to meet and train dancers who were new to me and to share with them how I put together a choreographic work." Effusively thanking Dance Initiative Executive Director Peter Gilbert, she adds, "I am deeply grateful for this opportunity."

Howe's original work, *Vacuum: a multi media performance*, wrapped up an Artist-in-Residency program that hosted three choreographers in 2015. The residencies began March with dancer/choreographer Patrick Mueller, a faculty member at the Colorado Conservatory of Dance who worked with Carbondale's contemporary dance company CoMotion to create a new work. Next, Dance Initiative welcomed choreographer Molissa Fenley, who has produced over 75 original works that have been performed at the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors, at the American Dance Festival and venues on every continent.

Howe, Dance Initiative's third resident artist, has danced professionally with the critically-acclaimed Jose Limon Dance Company and has served as a faculty at the Laban/ Bartenieff Institute, both in New York City. Howe also co-curates poetry and storytelling events at salons at Justice Snows in Aspen.

By turns quirky, funny, pensive and melancholy, Howe's *Vacuum* premiered at the Launchpad in November. It included a solo by Glenwood Springs native Emily Fifer and a tango duet between former Joffrey Ballet member Cynthia Gottlob and Sean Erickson, co-founder of Denver-based



Cynthia Gottlob and Sean Ericson heated up *Vacuum* with an Argentine tango; photo by Renee Range



Emily Fifer performs her solo during *Vacuum*; photo by Renee Range



Alysa Howe, creator of Vacuum; photo by Renee Ramge



Molissa Fenley; photo by Deborah Colley



Rehearsal on the silks; photo by Nicolette Toussaint

Parasol Arts. *Vacuum* also featured a video by Emmy-Award-winning filmmaker Kryisia Carter-Giez plus Meagan Lundy Shapiro, Kirsten Frantzich and Deborah Colley as a vacuum cleaner choir.

Colley, who works for the Dance Initiative and is herself a dancer, says, "Having this space has enabled us to host people who would never have been here otherwise. It makes me look back at all the other places that I've worked as a dancer and see that I have more survived than thrived. The dance process is really pretty delicate. Working on dance here is different – it almost has a meditative quality. Artists have studios; writers like quiet places to create. Now I have a place like that for dance. From my personal perspective, that's just incredible!"

Asked why he wanted to create the residencies, Gilbert explains, "A good part of my dream was that Carbondale could become a place where dance was *created*. With the Launchpad, we have a space that's conducive to having that happen. Without it, that never would happen. This allows us to become a place where dance is created not just by locals, but also by nationally- and internationally-acclaimed dancers."

In the fall of 2014, Dance Initiative partnered with the Carbondale Council for Arts and Humanities (CCAH) to retrofit Carbondale's old Gordon Cooper Library, transforming it into a 1,150-square-foot, sun-washed home for the arts. Art galleries, an artisan gift boutique and two professional-grade dance studios – an expansive Open Studio and Studio C, a 680-square-foot, sound-proofed space outfitted with mirrors and barres – were built. Spring-loaded Harlequin dance floors, the same type of resilient floor used by New York's Martha Graham dance company, were added under both studios. Support pillars were removed and multi-story silks were hung for aerial performers and circus classes.

Dance Initiative is planning another round of dance residencies in 2016. So far, they include Hewman, a collective of artists who fuse dance with other media, and Rashaun Mitchell + Sila Reiner; both groups are from New York. Mitchell and Reiner, who worked together at the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, create performances that include installations, improvisational dances, proscenium pieces and immersion experiences.

Over the past year, the Launchpad has accommodated dance classes that range from contemporary to tango, jazz and hip hop, and it has hosted 36 different renters. "Now dancers have a professional place to practice," says Colley. "They also get exposed to all kinds of things put together by CCAH."

CCAH's Executive Director Amy Kimberly ticks off multiple ways that, over the past year, the Launchpad has provided space for arts of all stripes: The recent *Dia de los Muertos* celebration involved puppetry and an outdoor ritual around a fire pit. The facility hosts yoga classes and capoeira is in the works. Paonia's Blue Sage Art Center used the space for its staff retreat. And in February, the Roaring Fork Follies will return to rehearse its annual burlesque show.

"One of the fun things about working here is all that's happening," says Kimberly. "I will come in the morning and there will be people dancing with vacuum cleaners. Or scantily dressed people practicing burlesque. Or aerial rehearsals on the silks. Something's always afoot!"