

Bringing Self Made Art to the Stage

Natasha Lardera (February 23, 2016)



Following the success of the pilot edition in 2013, Queens-based performance company Mare Nostrum Elements, founded by Italian performer Nicola Iervasi and American actor/director Kevin Albert, and LaGuardia Performing Arts Center (LPAC) partnered once again to present ECS#3, the Emerging Choreographer Series 2016. The ECS is a free a professional showcase in the Little Theater @ La Guardia Performing Arts Center in Long Island City, designed to address the challenges of bringing self-made art to the stage.

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Emerging Choreographer Series 2016 (Feb 22 and 23).

The Emerging Choreographer Series is a free a professional showcase in the Little Theater @ La Guardia Performing Arts Center in Long Island City, designed to address the challenges of bringing self-made art to the stage. The process is aimed at providing emerging choreographers with tools to create, develop and perform a new finished work.

During those weeks, following the structure of Mare Nostrum Elements signature method The Wave Within, selected participants, Rohan Bhargava, Tony Bordonaro/Jenna Sofia, Marissa Brown, Jacqueline Dugal, Pavel Machuca, Natalia Roberts, met weekly to stimulate their inspiration, create new movement and share ideas and feedback with fellow participants in a nurturing and collaborative setting. The choreographers received up to 60 hours of free rehearsal space where Iervasi and Albert helped them make fast, clear and smart choices to create movement and timely proceed with their work in progress.

"The Emerging Choreographer Series developed organically after teaching our method The Wave Within for several years," Nicola Iervasi told i-Italy when asked how the idea of the emerging choreographer series came up.

"More and more we would witness participants use material they had created in class to start a new piece, change an existing one, or use the tools they learned to better share their ideas with dancers or students. At a certain point we realized that the method was naturally serving not only as a performance enhancement and stage presence but also as a choreographic vehicle. Being in New York for several years, having danced for several companies and working as an administrator, I realized very soon how difficult it is to provide adequate funds and studio space to properly nurture a choreographic process".

"Mare Nostrum Elements was created with the scope of being more sensitive to artists voices and needs thus it felt natural to address some attention to choreographers that nowadays must navigate the artistic, the administrative and production aspect of a new work at the same time. It probably was the same in the past but with the change of the economic situation in the last decade, choreographers are facing less support (financial and practical), more demand of productivity and organization. It felt that we had to do something, we had the passion, the tools and the moral responsibility towards the new generations of dance makers."

Programs such as this one are important because "it is vital in the new economic and digital era," Iervasi continued.

"NYC is not anymore "the place to be" for an artist. Too often due to competition and restrictions it virtually is impossible to even present a new idea unless you come up with a decent amount of money or you are part of an organization/venue able to facilitate some of the aspects that go into a production".

"Fortunately some organizations and institutions are either run or close to artists so there is a collective effort to support creativity in more practical and meaningful ways. On one hand the corporate business model provided structural and financial ideas to the artistic world but on the other created inequity and shifted the attention from creativity to productivity and results. Thanks to our partnership with LPAC and our other partners for the ECS, we provide space, mentorship and a performance venue. These artists have access to a 360degree support system that assists them from the very beginning stage of their idea until the actual performance for the audience".

As Mare Nostrum Elements signature method The Wave Within gives structure to the program, it is important to get to know more about it.

"The Wave Within Method was basically born with the company in 2001 but we did not realized back then that we were creating a method. I was offered an opportunity to develop an idea I had for a show in collaboration with a then student of the NYU Music Department. It was a very ambitious



project (Mediterranean Voices) we had about 1 month to create from scratch a 40-45 minutes performance with live music (on stage) and about 15 performers. We had no money and not much time. "

"I had just met Kevin Albert a few months before, so I asked him to help me out come up with a rehearsal process that would allow us to proceed at a fast pace without compromising the quality of what we were creating, alienating the performers or abusing of their time. We came up with a very structured rehearsal process. Each rehearsal had a goal, each meeting was a class and a rehearsal at the same time. We used devising exercises to allow the performers to create their own material, find their own character, knowing that it would always be personal and more relatable from the audience point of view. The show was very successful, a few of the performers asked us if we could continue meeting and explore even if we had no commitment to perform or a new show to create. We gathered some thoughts together, found a space to accommodate our idea and started a series of weekend classes open to actors, dancers, musicians, comedians or any individual willing to explore movement from an introspective and emotional point of view".

Technically speaking The Wave Within Method, a response to the difficulties that performers often experience when taking acting and dance classes separately, utilizes a mix of Meisner and Grotowsky's acting techniques, contact improvisation, dance theater methods, and body conditioning techniques.

"Since we established the company 15 years ago," Iervasi concluded, "we always strived to value each artist's unique voice, making adjustments, listening to their ideas and using their best qualities specially with international artists. With the ECS we are now testing international collaborations in order to offer opportunities to young artists".

"Last Summer I was in Italy teaching a week long choreography workshop at the Fini Dance Summer School and I selected an Italian artist (Mirko Giordano) to join us for this year's program. We also partnered with IDaCo NYC (Italian Dance Connection) who will be selection one artist from the ECS to perform in their festival in May. Both Antonio Fini (of Fini Dance) and Vanessa Tamburi (Artistic Director of IDaCo) were part of the panel of professionals giving feedback and advice to our choreographers. I want these young artist to be exposed not only to different ways of creativity but also to different sensibilities and thought process. Having Vanessa and Antonio (who are both Italians who lived abroad for many years) allowed me to incorporate the European style and background."

For more information: www.mnelements.org

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