

Bowen McCauley Dance to take last bows, gives penultimate performance

Premiering a new work, 'Trois Rêves,' Founder and Choreographer Lucy Bowen McCauley anticipates the company's quarter-century finale.

By **Lisa Traiger** - June 2, 2021

As the dance world eases back to stages, Bowen McCauley Dance was among the first to dip a toe in to test the waters, dancing together on the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater stage before a very limited audience of the company's friends and supporters. The rest of the audience, including this reviewer, attended virtually.

Lucy Bowen McCauley founded her Arlington-based company a quarter century ago, and with her musical acuity and penchant for balletically flavored contemporary dance technique, it became a mainstay on the local dance circuit and beyond. But just as a dancer's onstage career is most often measured in years not decades or a lifetime, a dance company, too, can have its limits. At the program May 26, 2021, McCauley publicly announced that this performance would be her company's penultimate. She's not closing up shop due to the pandemic pause; in fact, Bowen McCauley shared with me years ago that she didn't foresee leading her company indefinitely and was considering the best time to choreograph her troupe's final performance. Twenty-five years felt like the right time. Then a global pandemic happened. So instead of finishing with a virtual production, Bowen McCauley Dance Company will take its last bows in September at the Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater.



Scene from 'Trois Rêves,' Bowen McCauley Dance Company. DCMTA screenshot.

In anticipation of that finale, McCauley created a new work for the Terrace Theater virtual program, *Trois Rêves*, to Maurice Ravel's complex three-movement piano score *Gaspard de la Nuit*, based on a bleak poem by Aloysius Bertrand. The dream ballet opens to a trio of women in flowing waves and undulations of movement; arms swirl like anemones and other sea creatures. When they cock a raised bent leg behind (*attitude*, for ballet aficionados), balancing on the other,

an image of seahorses comes to mind. Later the men join, yet dancers never meet; all their interactions are safely distanced. The second movement, “Le Gibet,” or gallows, proceeds slowly, steadily, relentlessly as Dustin Kimball, in black down to a pair of leather gloves, plods in. As the specter of death, he lashes his arms toward the grounded dancers. They succumb. Then a white-clad angelic figure (Justin Metcalf-Burton) enters; a battle of life forces ensues like a galactic faceoff as the two never make contact. The nightmarish sequence ends with Death in a moment of morose contemplation, yet a noose drops from above. Death prevails.

The final section lightens the mood with quick-footed, playful dances of nymphlike creatures coursing around a pajama-clad sleeping figure. Bright and spirited, the women leap with catlike grace, their silky dresses floating up around them, while the men cartwheel and squat like frogs. They gambol and scamper stalking the restless sleeper with frolicking abandon. *Trois Rêves*, expertly played by pianist Nikola Paskalov, the company’s music director, demonstrates Bowen McCauley’s sensitivity for and love of challenging 20th-century classical scores that suit her balletically inspired movement language.



Scene from ‘*Dances of the Yogurt Maker*.’ Photo by Jeff Malet.

The program opened with 2019’s *Dances of the Yogurt Maker*, a lovely abstraction drawing on elements of swirling and churning momentum that I imagine are involved in making yogurt. The score by Turkish composer Erberk Eryilmaz also provides Middle Eastern flavor. The dancers move through shapes hinting at Turkish architectural elements — arms raised above dancers’ heads palms together allude to Ottoman arches or the onion domes of minarets. Flexed wrists and bent elbows create curlicues and broken lines as a nod to calligraphy and curvilinear arabesques — the arcing swirls of Middle Eastern design not the ballet pose.

Bowen McCauley honored two longtime BMDC dancers: Alicia Curtis — 14 seasons — and Kimball — 15 seasons. The previously filmed duet from the choreographer’s 2015 work *Victory Road*, with a country-rock accompaniment by Jason and The Scorchers, showcased the dancers’ artistry and their valuable contributions to the company.

The resilience of the company and its dancers was evident in the strength of the well-rehearsed performances as well as the mindfulness to ongoing pandemic concerns. For both live works, the dancers wore masks, and Bowen McCauley adjusted any choreography that required physical contact in *Yogurt Maker*; thus no lifts or partnering occurred. Choreographed while following COVID-19 social-distancing restrictions, *Trois Rêves* featured seven dancers moving expertly and connecting and interacting without ever making any physical contact to comply with COVID safety regulations.

Lucy Bowen McCauley (bowing) and ensemble. At left: pianist Nikola Paskalov. Photo by David Moss.

Bowen McCauley Dance Company's 25th-anniversary program will be available for a short time on Vimeo and YouTube (see below). Pre-show conversation starts at the 35-minute mark and the dancing begins at the 50-minute mark.

Visit the company website bmdc.org for further details and information on the company's Silver Anniversary Season Finale September 14, 2021.

SEE ALSO:

Twenty Years with Love' at Bowen McCauley Dance by Jessica Vaughan (March 20, 2016)
Bowen McCauley Dance 20th Anniversary Celebration at Dance Place by Robert Michael Oliver (October 26, 2015)

Lisa Traiger

An arts journalist since 1985, Lisa Traiger writes frequently on the performing arts for Washington Jewish Week and other local and national publications, including *Dance*, *Pointe*, and *Dance Teacher*. She also edits *From the Green Room*, *Dance/USA's* online eJournal. She was a freelance dance critic for *The Washington Post Style* section from 1997-2006. As arts correspondent, her pieces on the cultural and performing arts appear regularly in the *Washington Jewish Week*

where she has reported on Jewish drum circles, Israeli folk dance, Holocaust survivors, Jewish Freedom Riders, and Jewish American artists from Ben Shahn to Rodgers and Hammerstein, Stephen Sondheim to Y Love, Anna Sokolow to Liz Lerman. Her dance writing can also be read on DanceViewTimes.com. She has written for Washingtonian, The Forward, Moment, Dance Studio Life, Stagebill, Sondheim Review, Asian Week, New Jersey Jewish News, Atlanta Jewish Times, and Washington Review. She received two Simon Rockower Awards for Excellence in Arts Criticism from the American Jewish Press Association; a 2009 shared Rockower for reporting; and in 2007 first-place recognition from the Maryland-Delaware-D.C. Press Association. In 2003, Traiger was a New York Times Fellow in the Institute for Dance Criticism at the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C. She holds an M.F.A. in choreography from the University of Maryland, College Park, and has taught dance appreciation at the University of Maryland and Montgomery College, Rockville, Md. Traiger served on the Dance Critics Association Board of Directors from 1991-93, returned to the board in 2005, and served as co-president in 2006-2007. She was a member of the advisory board of the Dance Notation Bureau from 2008-2009.

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