

Global Collaborations

Seán Curran Company travels to Central Asia this April.

DanceMotion USA forges ties around the world. BY LISA TRAIGER

The phone call was unlike any other Lynn Dally received during her 32 years as co-founder and artistic director of Jazz Tap Ensemble. “President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton invite you to represent the United States on an international tour”—to Africa. The call came last year from Brooklyn Academy of Music executive producer Joseph Melillo, who oversees BAM’s contract with the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (BECA).

Dally’s L.A.-based touring ensemble is one of four U.S. companies selected for the second season of DanceMotion USA, a U.S. Department of State-sponsored program that brings American companies to foreign audiences, administered by BAM. The fundamental principle of the program is direct citizen diplomacy.

“DanceMotion USA is American diplomacy in motion. These artists use the common language of dance to engage with people in communities throughout the world,” says Ann Stock, assistant secretary of state for BECA.

The companies joining Jazz Tap Ensemble on official U.S.-sponsored tours this year are Philadelphia’s Rennie

Harris Puremovement (hip-hop concert dance) to the Middle East; New York’s Seán Curran Company (contemporary) to former Soviet republics; and Boise, Idaho’s Trey McIntyre Project (contemporary ballet) (See “Face to Face,” page 22) to Asia.

Seán Curran has toured the globe, first as a dancer with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, and later independently on teaching and choreographic residencies. “It’s thrilling for me because this is not a tour where we’re just going to show up and do our one-night stand. It’s really going to be a cultural exchange,” he says. Curran is ready to get to know locals and share studio time to engage youngsters.

Meanwhile, Dally will take 100 pairs of tap shoes in various sizes, so she and her four dancers can conduct workshops for children and young adults during their residencies. “We’re taking the instruments to them. We’re ready for as much direct exchange as possible,” she says. This tour is special, she adds, because it brings two indigenous American artforms, jazz and tap, to the taproot in Africa.

Following the 2010 trial year, which sent abroad Ronald K. Brown’s

Evidence and Urban Bush Women, both of Brooklyn, and ODC/Dance of San Francisco, Melillo, with input from the first-year participants, selected the four companies to tour in 2012. “We were looking for American values [expressed] in the artform,” he says. “There is cultural diversity in each of these dance companies, and our democratic values are represented by them interpreting the dance forms.” The goal is to cement relationships that will enable these companies to return on their own in subsequent years and invite foreign artists they meet to the U.S. to collaborate and perform.

Rennie Harris Puremovement travels to Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan (March–April); Jazz Tap Ensemble is in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Democratic Republic of Congo (April–May); Seán Curran Company goes to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan (April–May); Trey McIntyre Project tours to China, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam (May–June).

For more: www.dancemotionusa.org **DT**

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