

Bellingham dance-theater troupe Kuntz and Company tackles the issue of child abuse

HIGHLIGHTS

New performance piece addresses deals with parenting, child abuse, and how one person can make a difference in the life of a child.



By Margaret Bikman - The Bellingham Herald

Bellingham dancer and choreographer Pam Kuntz says she was ready to create her next dance-theater piece about the subjects of faith or religion when Alan Stein, a board member at Brigid Collins, a nonprofit organization that deals with preventing child abuse in greater Whatcom County, asked her if she would make a piece about caring for the children in our community.

Kuntz has tackled numerous controversial issues in the past; in fact, her mission statement for Kuntz and Company is "to tell the stories of our community through the arts with the intention of gaining a better understanding of the human condition."

Stein made a great pitch, she says, and so she decided to give it a go.

"Hide and Seek" is the 15th in a series of performance pieces created by Kuntz that have explored a wide range of social and personal issues using the stories of local community members.

Kuntz has presented performances on individuals whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS, real-life stories of imprisonment, and eating disorders.

"Hide and Seek" opens Friday, Oct. 17, and plays through Oct. 26 at the Firehouse Performing Arts Center in Fairhaven.

She found nine individuals with different backgrounds and experiences in the Bellingham community who said they'd be willing to talk with her.

Richard Scholtz, who's worked with Kuntz in the past, agreed to record these conversations, and he also participated in the conversations.

Kuntz then listened to each person a few times (each one was two hours) and she picked the portions that she thought would further the piece. She invited photographer and videographer Jaynie Hancock to make some short films that help illustrate these stories. Hancock has photographed a few of the company's pieces over the years and is just fabulous, says Kuntz.

"I knew the performers I wanted to work with and thankfully they were all free and interested. Three of them are frequent collaborators and one is a student at Western Washington University who is really a remarkable dancer," she says.

The interviews took place in June and July and the film work happened in July and August. The dancers, who were hired in May, started rehearsals in September, spending about 20 hours each week.

"Finding a title for this piece was actually pretty difficult," Kuntz says.

Angela Kiser, a frequent collaborator with Kuntz, suggested that they look at children's games for possible titles.

"When I landed on 'hide and seek,' the double meanings hit me over the head," says Kuntz.

"Many of the stories we hear talk of children hiding, families hiding, children seeking, parents seeking, our community hiding."

The work deals with parenting, child abuse, adoption and most importantly, how one person can make a difference in the life of a child.

Because of some of the difficult issues in the work, Kuntz advises that audience members be at least 15 year old.

"There are some details and facts that I am not prepared to explain to my children (ages 8 and 10)," she says.

"It really depends on the parent. There is a lot of positive, very optimistic work in this show...and there are a few tougher moments. These are the moments that would be difficult to explain to a child. My boys have not been to any rehearsals and won't be seeing the show. They have been bugging me to see it but I told them they just aren't ready. My friend is bringing her teenager. She is ready."

And that work she'd been meaning to do originally, the one about faith or religion?

"I really think that piece has to happen," she says.

"I am ready. I am interested in hearing different perspectives on this topic ... perspectives from people who are not from this country in particular. I haven't decided yet if the project is faith or religion (I see these two as very different).

"Some say I should avoid religion as that will scare people away. Of course that very reason is reason enough to do it."

As she's said in the past, "exploring something we don't even want to talk about is really just the beginning."



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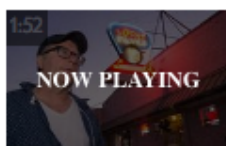
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