LIVING
Dance

New multimedia dance work exploring water features photography and poetry

'Tidal' explores relationships in intergenerational dance piece by Kuntz and Company

September 30, 2023 at 12:05 a.m.

Rebecca DeGraw finesses one of four drapes, making it bellow behind her at Kuntz and Company's private home studio in Bellingham on Tuesday, Sept. 26. Kuntz and Company are putting on a dance called "Tidal" at the FireHouse Arts and Events Center Oct. 5-8. *(Andrew Ford/Cascadia Daily News)*

By **MARISSA MOERI**
CDN Contributor

I didn't know it was possible to find such pleasure in traveling back and forth across a stage in a line until I began rehearsing with Pam Kuntz and the community of dancers involved in "Tidal" — a new multimedia dance

work featuring the photography of Helen Scholtz and the poetry of Jessica Ardis.

Charles Halka's splashing, bubbling and flowing sound-score accompanies the piece, which premieres Oct. 5–8 at the FireHouse Arts and Events Center.

In "Tidal" the dancers speak and even sing. And then there's the fabric and the gorgeous projected images of water and reflections. The cast of 16 dancers/co-creators spans five generations and includes a public defender, current and former dance students, therapists, movement practitioners, moms and past collaborators.

Pamela Kuntz walks the dancers of "Tidal" through some edits for their routine during a rehearsal. *(Andrew Ford/Cascadia Daily News)*

Many of the dancers are over 50 and the oldest is 80. At 39, I fall somewhere in the middle.

In bringing this group together Kuntz said, "We are constantly navigating our meeting points with each other."

What could be seen as limiting — working with different schedules and changing abilities — has helped inform the structure. Tasks and watershed moments help guide the dancers on their journeys, and choices are constantly being made as dancers maintain an awareness of each other and the audience.

"Movement improvisation is one of my great loves, so experimenting with various combinations of people and images/metaphors has been wonderfully fulfilling," dancer Lucy Morse said. "Pam's process is graceful and generous, funny and thoughtful, so if something doesn't work, she has asked for our input."

At times "Tidal" diverts away, though not entirely, from traditional dance movement in favor of recognizable gestures, such as swimming and "signing" and pedestrian tasks.

Kuntz invites audience members to experience a sense of participation in the dance. In rehearsal, my partner in the movement study "This/That," Tracy Rienstra, offered a hand and somehow we ended up with her

The group of 18 dancers range in age from 18-79. *(Andrew Ford/Cascadia Daily News)*

standing and walking on my feet. Virtuosic movement? Maybe not. Human? Yes.

Although it was initially conceived as an examination of water, Kuntz said, "The piece ended up being more about making choices and the results of those choices in our world, on the other humans and on the planet."

The dancers are backdropped by hanging cloth that reflects images of nature and water from projectors. *(Andrew Ford/Cascadia Daily News)*

Kuntz cites her personal experience from the flooding from the Nooksack River in 2021 and the global increase in water-related disasters as informing the piece. The world of "Tidal" draws surprising parallels between the way water behaves and what it means to be a human.

There are moments of wonder and calm within shared experiences, while other "moving pictures," such as those reciprocally inspired by Ardis' "Wake" poems, examine how destructive behaviors intersect on a human and an environmental level.

Sholtz uses a macro lens to capture moments in time and, as she puts it, "the things that we pass by every day." Ardis' poetry is embedded in "Tidal" and is interwoven into the choreography and performance. The "Wake"

poems came directly out of a free-write session involving Kuntz, Halka, Ardis, Scholtz and early collaborators Cara Congelli and Bailey Krager.

Dancers flow back and forth through the dance hall with smooth, random motions that mimic tides. *(Andrew Ford/Cascadia Daily News)*

Throughout, "Tidal" words clarify, contain and add depth and discernible meaning to the movement. Halka dove into the creation process using lists of descriptive words, a video of the May 2023 work-in-progress showing and access to images and poetry.

Halka's collected sounds, including the dancers' recorded voices, waves on Whidbey Island, and the sound of rain in his own backyard, at times spread and multiply like ripples on the surface of water.

Kuntz said she hopes the duets and relationships that emerge among the dancers along with the atmospheric elements in the sounds, images and poetry will help audience members "see how they live in the world, not only how they live with other people."

Pamela Kuntz is held by her dancers as they pose for a group photo. *(Andrew Ford/Cascadia Daily News)*

Regarding building community, dancer Rebecca DeGraw said saying yes to this process took courage.

"Being seen and respected fuels my ability to keep saying yes," she said. "It has helped me adjust my outlook on my aging process and my health challenges. I feel so much more accepting of my changing abilities and celebrate how I show up now."

"Tidal" shows at 7 p.m. Oct. 5–7 and 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 8 at the FireHouse Arts and Events Center, 1314 Harris Ave. Tickets are pay as you like, minimum $1, suggested $20. Advance ticket purchases are recommended, as performances will sell out. Info: kuntzandco.org.