



Luis Sanchez Saturno/The New Mexican

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARCS

Robert Nott | The New Mexican

The dancers move like gazelles possessed by the souls of tigers while wielding buckets of water, ice, and mud in a fast-moving, high-voltage number choreographed to selections from Philip Glass' *Songs From Liquid Days*. For Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," the ensemble doesn't dance to music — it moves to a recorded reading of the piece by Basil Rathbone. And when it comes to The Mamas and the Papas' "Dream a Little Dream of Me," the dancers wear blank masks that give the piece a dark edge that may suggest a nightmare. Weird? Unusual? Daring? That's for the audience to decide, of course.

"I'm not trying to please everyone," said Curtis Uhlemann, artistic director of the newly formed preprofessional company Arcos Dance, which is made up of 21 dancers ranging in age from 14 to 28. "We're trying to create a show that goes further out with the form than anything we've done before, a show that stretches the artists' boundaries."

The "we" includes associate artistic director Erica Gionfriddo, who co-choreographed the Glass and Poe pieces with Uhlemann. They each have individually choreographed works in the show, as well. The two currently teach at various dance studios in New Mexico including Moving People Dance Center, the 120-seat performance space where Arcos opens its debut concert on Friday, Oct. 14, for a two-weekend run.

"We're creating an entity that exists solely on its own and is not tied to any school in town," Uhlemann said following a recent rehearsal. "Arcos' goal is to create an artistic bridge for dancers between scholastic training and professional performing," Gionfriddo added.

Being part of a company as focused on training as Moving People is can restrict artists in some ways, the directors said, because there's a need to conform to what students, parents, donors, and audience members expect from such an entity. But with an independent company, "We can do our own work rather than do a show with six or seven other choreographers," Uhlemann said. "The handcuffs are off."

The dancers — some of whom have also worked at Moving People — appear to enjoy being unshackled. One of them is Jocelyn Montoya, a native Santa Fean who recently graduated from the University of New Mexico. She took classes at the National Dance Institute of New Mexico and had seen previous dance works choreographed by Uhlemann and Gionfriddo.

"I knew it'd be a great opportunity to perform with them," Montoya said. "Santa Fe is full of dancers and people who want to perform but can't find a way to do it all year round. Until now, no one has been bold enough to give voice to aspiring professional dancers and say, Hey, we're going to do five shows a year."

That's the goal. Arcos has already lined up an ambitious schedule of five programs through the spring of 2012 and is working on setting up a European tour next summer. (Gionfriddo taught and toured with five of the Arcos dancers in Spain during the summer.)

Chicago dancer Katie Hopkins decided to come out west to give Arcos a try. She graduated from Columbia College in May with the question, "Oh my God, what am I going to do now?" hanging over her head, she said. "In Chicago there are two extremes — you either find very professional opportunities or people who are trying to do small



Members of Arcos Dance

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shows and break in. There's not much middle ground." She has known Uhlemann for five years, and he invited her to join Arcos. "So far it's been really good. There's no way I would dance this much in Chicago."

Regarding one of the works in the show, Uhlemann said he has always liked Poe's poem. "I've rarely seen group pieces choreographed to the spoken word. I wanted to create something a little unworriedly ... and over the top." The fact that Halloween is just around the corner apparently has little to do with that choice.

The Glass piece is an adaptation of a work originally created in 1999 by two of Uhlemann's New York mentors: Peter Garrow and Sam Cappadonia. "I wanted to work with the elements of dirt, water, ice," he said — emphasizing that the audience will not get caught up in the ensuing mess.

The Mamas and the Papas song serves as a framework for violinist Karina Wilson to support the dancers with what Gionfriddo calls "an ambient, pretty dark melody. We're taking a totally '60s, pretty happy tune and giving it a dark interpretation." The show features four other numbers — three choreographed by Gionfriddo and one by Uhlemann — in a roughly 90-minute production with an intermission.

Dancers who joined the company this year are guaranteed a year's worth of performing, after which time they have to audition again. The two directors want to eventually split Arcos into two groups: one touring professional company (in which dancers would, ideally, get paid) and the current pre-professional group. (Auditions for new dancers take place from 4 to 6 p.m. Oct. 29 at Moving People Dance Center, 1583 Pacheco St., Suite A2. Reservations are due by Oct. 28; 473-7434 or info@arcosdance.com.)

As for the ensemble's name, Uhlemann said he was looking for something like "Arcadia." While searching around, he came across the word *arcos*, mathematical shorthand for the inverse of the cosine function in trigonometry. "It's like arcs in space," he said. "I liked the look of it, the sound of it. It fits." ◀