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Saturday, December 5, 2020

Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble presents a FREE Rooms Symposium Celebrating 65 years of Sokolow's ROOMS

Company: Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble
 Venue: Online
 Location: New York, NY

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Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble will present a symposium on Anna Sokolow's Rooms on December 5, 2020. This FREE event will be moderated by Dance Enthusiast Founder and Editor in Chief Christine Jowers, and feature speakers from the Library of Congress, Prof. Neil Baldwin, and dancers who have performed Rooms across a half-century. The symposium will be open to the public and hosted as a Zoom webinar. To register, visit www.sokolowtheatredance.org.

Artistic Director Samantha Geracht, Associate Artistic Directors Eleanor Bunker and Lauren Naslund and company members have been teaching - virtually - sections from Rooms this fall to college dance departments around the country.

"The pandemic is still with us and we are all in uncharted artistic territory," said Ms. Geracht. "The creativity and determination with which the dancers, faculty, and staff have met these new challenges have been inspirational."

Students at seven colleges are studying and presenting excerpts of Rooms this year, and no two schools produced the piece the same way. In attendance at the symposium will be members of each college, including Kansas State University, Loyola University Chicago, CSU Fullerton, Williams College, University of Southern Idaho, Kanopy Dance, and Ailey/Fordham.

The speakers who will present include Neil Baldwin, PhD, author of Martha Graham: When Dance Became Modern, forthcoming from Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.; Library of Congress Dance Curator and Archivist Libby Smigel, PhD; and Library of Congress Senior Musicologist Loras John Schissel. Smaller group panels will include dancers who have performed Rooms over a half-century: Jim May, Hannah Kahn, Susan Thomasson, Luis Gabriel Zaragoza, Kristen Foote, Daniel Fetecua Soto, and Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba.

Panels will also include several film makers, creators of pandemic virtual

Rooms events. The event will incorporate a collage from virtual performances made during lockdown this fall.

Celebrating 65 years of Rooms

"Art is a mirror."

If life imitates art far more than art imitates life, then Anna Sokolow was distinctly ahead of her time.

Rooms, Sokolow's 1955 masterpiece, examined the psychic isolation and unfulfilled desires of characters isolated in their small, city apartments. The controversial and groundbreaking work probed and made palpable the loneliness and alienation following the breakdown of wartime solidarity, when the threat of atomic annihilation, the 1952 polio epidemic, and the Red Scare hung like invisible contagions, spreading pervasive anxiety and dread over America.

The Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble began rehearsals for Rooms in August 2019 as one half of a concert series scheduled for March 2020 entitled "Real+Surreal" that would include Sokolow's 1970 surrealist dance/theatre work Magritte, Magritte.

Rooms was intended to be the 'real' half of a program that celebrated these works on their 65th and 50th anniversaries.

Then, a new contagion spread across the world, and human existence changed. In 2020, Rooms has become both real and surreal. Anna Sokolow's 1955 choreography resonates with uncanny power in a world where people everywhere are living quarantined in their homes. Surely, cut off from each other in the grip of a global pandemic, we are all living Rooms.

This abrupt change in circumstances has forced an adaptation in our approach to

Rooms that has required the company to rise to unique challenges to its directors, its dancers, and in how the performance was presented.

Separated from one another - our rehearsals and theater dates cancelled - the Sokolow/Theatre Dance Ensemble came together to create a virtual presentation of

Rooms. Buoyed by the possibilities of ways to rethink and teach Rooms remotely, the Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble has collaborated with colleges across the country to create their own virtual productions of Rooms during this pandemic year - reenvisioning the mid-century masterpiece for this modern era.

About the Speakers

Neil Baldwin, PhD, is a critic in Residence at The Blended Campus, a Professor Emeritus of Theatre & Dance in the College of the Arts at Montclair State University, and the author of *Martha Graham: When Dance Became Modern*, forthcoming from Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Libby Smigel, PhD, is a Dance Curator and Archivist in the Music Division of the Library of Congress.

Loras John Schissel is a senior musicologist at the Library of Congress and a leading authority on the music of Percy Aldridge Grainger, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and Boston Symphony Orchestra conductor Serge Koussevitzky.

About the Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble Artists

Samantha Geracht (Artistic Director) After performing with Anna Sokolow's Players' Project for eleven years, and as a founding member of Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble since 2004, Ms. Geracht was appointed artistic director of Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble in January of 2017. Ms. Geracht has toured and taught Sokolow internationally, and reconstructs Sokolow repertory on professional companies and in college and university dance programs. She has reconstructed Sokolow work at a variety of dance programs including The Boston Conservatory, Franklin and Marshall, Barnard College, Morris County Community College, Centre de Danse Nationale de Paris, Kanopy Dance company, Ellen Robbins Dance as well as worked with various soloists including Jennifer Conelly, Kim Jones, and Sandra Kaufman.

Ms. Geracht has also performed the Humphrey/Weidman repertory with Deborah Carr Theatre Dance Ensemble, and with Gail Corbin since 1993. She regularly works with Rae Ballard's *Thoughts in Motion*, and she has also performed with Jim May, as a guest artist with David Parker and The Bang Group as well as in her own choreography. In 2016 she choreographed Shadowbox Theatre's *The Earth and Me*, a climate change puppet/dance opera for school aged children. Ms. Geracht has studied with and been mentored by Jim May, Betty Jones, and Fritz Ludin for the last 25 years. She holds an MFA from Montclair State University and a BS in dance from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and spent three years in the professional studies program at the Nikolais/Louis dance lab. Ms. Geracht is involved in various projects to maintain the legacies of early American Modern Dance and is committed to making these early works more accessible both to new artists and audiences. She has often taught in the Professional Studies program at the Limon Institute, HB studios, and she is on the middle school arts faculty at the Hoboken Charter School.

Jim May (Founder and Director) Mr. May was a devoted disciple of Anna Sokolow for 35 years and co-artistic director of her dance company, Players' Project, since 1990. His aim as founder of the Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble was to expand the art of dance to include the other arts (music, theater, painting, literature), working toward a progressive new style of theater/dance.

Mr. May was a dancer on the New York scene for over 40 years, having also danced with the Li-món Company under Jose Limón's direction and as a soloist under Carla Maxwell's direction, the Ruth Currier Company, and as a principal dancer with the Danny Lewis company. Mr. May embraced the distinct dance styles of both Ms. Sokolow and Mr. Limón. He won a 1996 Fulbright Scholarship to Mexico City to extend his studies of his two mentors and their roles in the "across the border" relationship between modern dance in the US and Mexico.

Mr. May has taught on the faculties of SUNY Purchase, Juilliard School of Music, and Princeton University, and was on the faculty of the Limón Institute for many years. In 1992 he received the Marcus Award for Teaching Excellence from Washington University. He taught extensively in

Taiwan, where he founded the company Dance Forum Taipei, and in Mexico at Central de Investigacion Corografica. He has taught at many Universities and schools in Italy, France, Germany, Korea, Canada, South America, Switzerland and the United States, and was granted a Fulbright award to teach in Chile. His choreography has been in the repertoires of Dance Conduit, Dance Forum Taipei, Thoughts in Motion, and the Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble. He has danced on Broadway and was a member of the Eliot Feld Ballet Company. As a guest artist, he has performed works by Donald McKayle, Don Redlich, Murray Louis, Pauline Koner, and Kurt Jooss.

Mr. May received the 1999 Bessie Award for lifetime achievement, "for a sustained achievement over decades as dance's premiere leading man, an actor-dancer of extraordinary range and scope of character, in the living theater of Anna Sokolow."

Eleanor Bunker (Associate Artistic Director) holds degrees from Hartford College for Women and SUNY Empire State College. She began her modern and ballet training at the Hartford Ballet where she studied with Enid Lynn, Lisa Bradley, and Michael Uthoff. She was a soloist and rehearsal director for eleven years with Rondo Dance Theater, a repertory company which featured masterworks of the American Modern Dance genre under the artistic direction of Elizabeth Rockwell. She continues to perform the repertory of Isadora Duncan, and is the dance faculty at Dominican Academy in NYC. Eleanor was a member of Anna Sokolow's Players' Project for 14 years and has been a member of Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble since its founding. Eleanor reconstructs Anna Sokolow's repertory and directs rehearsals for the company and for schools and professional dancers. She also oversees costuming for the company.

Lauren Naslund (Associate Artistic Director) began her modern dance studies in Chicago with Frances Allis. She holds degrees in biology from the University of Chicago and Harvard. She danced in Cambridge, MA with the Performing Arts Ensemble and the Massachusetts Dance Ensemble and in New York with the theater/dance company Plath/Taucher Productions. She has performed the works of Charles Weidman and Doris Humphrey with Deborah Carr's Theatre Dance Ensemble, and under the direction of Gail Corbin. She also works with Rae Ballard's Thoughts in Motion and Andrew Jannetti & Dancers. She was a member of Anna Sokolow's Players' Project for 15 years and has been with Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble since its founding. Lauren reconstructs Anna Sokolow's repertory and directs rehearsals for the company and for schools and professional dancers.

About Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble

The Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble was founded in 2004 to be the artistic repository of Anna Sokolow's repertory. The company's aim is to reconstruct and perform the Sokolow repertory, teach and coach her repertory on other professional companies, and make her works accessible for students ranging from middle school to college and pre-professional. The company also encourages contemporary choreographers interested in dance theater, through projects allowing them to choreograph on experienced Sokolow dancers. The multi-generational makeup of the company dancers, ranging in age from 25 through over 60, is unusually inclusive for a dance company, enhancing Ms. Sokolow's dances, which explore the depths of the human experience. Since 2004, the ensemble has reconstructed and performed over 20 of Ms. Sokolow's works. Several have been restaged from archival footage and original cast memory in order to recreate and preserve the legacy.

The aim of the Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble is to present works from Sokolow's vast choreography that are relevant to the times we live in and touch the hearts of all people, everywhere, struggling with the universal issues of living despite differences in place and culture. For more information, visit sokolowtheatredance.org.

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Schedule
December 5, 2020: 2:00pm

[< back](#)

[previous listing](#) • [next listing](#)