



ANNAMYERANDDANCERS





ANNA MYER AND DANCERS THE STREET TALK, SUITE TALK PROJECT

AN EXTRAORDINARY COLLABORATION: A FUSION OF ART FORMS

Street Talk Suite Talk (STST) stands at the crossroads of multiple art forms. This evening-length original work fuses rap/spoken word, contemporary dance, and music for violin. With poetry created by young rappers and spoken word artists, music that stems from a classical tradition, and the unique choreography of Anna Myer, *STST* creates a new language of expression dedicated to fostering social change through art. *STST* demonstrates that social change occurs when many people change themselves by seeing the world through the eyes of “the other”. The work encourages a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

The Street Talk Suite Talk Project has been created through a collaborative effort that brings together individuals from several different backgrounds and art disciplines, all working to craft a common vision and bring it to life.

Anna Myer and the artists from *STST* came together to work as one and are a good example of how artistic collaboration can affect a diverse group of people.

- Choreographer Anna Myer of Anna Myer and Dancers, a critically acclaimed contemporary dance company located in Cambridge, MA
- Composer Jakov Jakoulov and violinist Mark Berger

- Dancers: Karina Davis, Joe Gonzalez, Jeremy Revilock-Frost, Marissa Molinar, Hieu Nguyen, Nina Saraceno, and Henoch Spinola
- Rappers: Anthony Marshal and Lynn Harris
- Spoken Word Artists: TiElla Grimes and Tu Phan
- With spoken word artists, Adam Gottlieb and Nova Venerable, featured in *Louder Than a Bomb* documentary.

This is a unique and extraordinary combination of people with diverse approaches to art. The result is an original multidisciplinary work that speaks to people from many backgrounds and from many parts of the community. Our approach is rooted in the belief that no cultural, musical, or choreographic styles are mutually exclusive.

Follow these links to YouTube to watch videos of *STST* in action:

<http://youtu.be/IHWXknMuwgl>

<http://youtu.be/LzT0Wj238Ic>

Louder than a Bomb:

<http://www.siskeljacobs.com/louder-than-a-bomb.php>



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DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

The Street Talk Suite Talk Project began as *Street Talk Suite Talk (STST)*, a dance piece which started as one double duet: two young male rappers and a male and female dancer, which premiered at APAP in New York City in January of 2008. From that one performance the company was invited to perform abroad and the piece has grown into a full-length work in two Acts.

Now, *The Street Talk Suite Talk Project* is flexible in execution and can adapt to many settings and include integration of different poets as well as workshops for dancers and poets of all ages. This results in a different *Street Talk Suite Talk* each time but with the same outcome as the original duet: intergration and communication between different art forms and different people.

- *Street Talk Suite Talk, Act I* had its full-length premiere in November 2008 at Boston's historic Strand Theater. Presented by Boston Mayor Thomas Menino's Office., the performance was a major critical and popular success, and drew a large and diverse audience.
- In the fall of 2009, AMD was invited to perform *STST* at the Fringe Festival in Scotland.
- *STST, ACT II*, extended *Street Talk Suite Talk* into a 90-minute Rap Opera. In contrast to Act I, which illuminates what Boston Globe critic Thea Singer called: "urban nightmares," Act II focuses on hope, change, growth, and "being gold."
- *STST*, the complete rap opera in 2 acts, premiered in Boston in May 2010. Chorus led by S. D. Wyner performed during finale.

- In 2011, with funding from numerous grants and donors, AMD brought the project to school children of Boston's inner city, Dorchester, and Cambridge in *STST: Mixing up the Neighborhoods*. AMD bussed students from economically, culturaly, and racially diverse neighborhoods to see Act I and Act II in two different locations (ICA and Roxbury Center for Arts). Between the two performances, AMD also taught poetry and dance workshops, which integrated the dance and poetry of students from different neighborhoods, schools, and backgrounds. The participants of the dance workshop performed at the ICA following the Anna Myer and Dancers *STST* performance.

Since November 2008, *Street Talk Suite Talk* has been presented at numerous Boston events, in New York City, throughout the NE, and abroad. The company has been performing full works in theaters and excerpts at community venues—colleges, youth centers, anti-violence seminars, dance festivals, gallery openings, etc.



Currently, Anna Myer And Dancers and The Street Talk, Suite Talk Project, are collaborating with Youth Link, a program run by the North American Family Institute (NAFI). You can view more about Youth Link on YouTube here: <http://youtu.be/ikSFytbSdf4> and <http://vimeo.com/12561891>

The STST Project forges bonds between disparate populations on both sides of the proscenium. By combining artistic traditions, *STST* challenges its performers and touches a broad audience, and we hope to see it performed around the U.S. and internationally.

For more information, please contact us. We are eager to discuss bringing Street Talk Suite Talk to your community.



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ANNA MYER AND DANCERS THE STREET TALK, SUITE TALK PROJECT

WORKSHOPS AND PERFORMANCES

The Street Talk Suite Talk Project can be presented in different formats. We are happy to design a program that best fits the needs of your theater and community.

MOVE THE WORD WORKSHOPS:

In our five day workshops, we guide participants through a series of writing and movement challenges similar to those we used to create *Street Talk Suite Talk*. The workshops help participants develop critical skills for collaboration, increasing their ability to communicate about art and community. Our company creates an environment that is simultaneously nurturing and demanding. Respect for multiple viewpoints, cultures, and artistic styles is central to our company's philosophy and we find this value to be quite contagious!

The workshops are led by the company's poets and dancers, promoting Myer's strong belief that artists should teach as a way to develop a stronger understanding of their own craft, richer connections to their audience, and a sustainable lifestyle for supporting their art. The participants are taught how to create their own vocabulary and choreographic language by exploring relevant issues in their own lives and neighborhoods. The spoken word material serves as the inspiration for creating solo dance pieces by the dancers in the movement workshop. The resulting collaborative work is performed at the end of the workshop.

INTEGRATION OF LOCAL POETS (into STST) WORKSHOP / PERFORMANCE:

Anna Myer and a poet (cast of STST) will work with local poets/rappers and dancers in a workshop format.

Participants who will be given subject matter to write about, their poetry will be given to dancer to make dances from. The full cast of STST will travel to location for a 3-4 day workshop to integrate the local poets and dancers into STST culminating in a performance(s).

INTEGRATION, MIXING UP THE NEIGHBORHOODS

Working with local arts and educational organizations, Anna Myer and Dancers will bus students from economically, culturally, and racially diverse neighborhoods to see Act I and Act II in two different locations. The students will be bused into each others neighborhoods' theaters/venues (to see where and how others live). Between the two performances, there is an option to include **Move The Word** workshop, which will integrate the dance and poetry of students from different neighborhoods, schools and backgrounds.

STST: Mixing Up the Neighborhoods raises awareness of ethnic and economic segregation by empowering youth of different backgrounds to experience, under one roof, a powerful, collaborative work of art that is integrated within itself. Teaching by example is something that works uniquely well in *The STST Project*. First the students will view the piece that inspired the project and then with the help of facilitated discussions, lesson plans, and a five day workshop, these same youth are encouraged to address their own issues through artistic collaboration.



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WORKSHOPS **AND** PERFORMANCES

PERFORMANCE ONLY:

Performances of STST (full length rap/spoken word opera) can be performed in many different settings: theaters, gyms, ball rooms, outside festivals etc.

Act I, consists of ten sections that mix violin, rap/spoken word, and dance. These seemingly unmixable art forms are fused together by the artists' common interest in expressing the challenges of urban living in a world that is often fragmented and still racially separated and distrustful.

Act II, brings the vision of hope and change to today's still-troubled streets. Dancers interpret the poets' words about what it means to "be gold" – to develop the inner strength and personal growth to rise above the circumstances of life in the inner city.

We can present the Rap Opera as a:

55 minute, single act production

90 minute, two act production

90 minute, two act production with community workshop

The company offers a Q and A session following each the performance.

Master Classes: ballet, modern dance, jazz and yoga can be provided upon request.

Class Room Talks: A single poet can give talks in a school setting.

Choruses from different parts of the city can partake in the finale of STST by singing.

The Street Talk Suite Talk Project gives voice to underrepresented populations in every locality; it has been a tremendous success so far, and can be a mechanism for change in your community.

For more information, please contact us.

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ANNA MYER AND DANCERS THE STREET TALK, SUITE TALK PROJECT

ABOUT THE COLLABORATORS

ANNA MYER AND DANCERS

Since its founding in 1992, Anna Myer and Dancers (AMD) has performed Anna Myer's innovative choreography to a steadily growing audience throughout the Northeast, most notably in Boston, New York City, and also at the 2009 Fringe Festival in Scotland, and to the acclaim of some of the country's most prominent dance critics. Myer's unique language of movement is a fusion of her classical, modern, and postmodern background. Her dances are emotionally charged and infused with a keen formal intelligence. Myer had a feature article in the Sunday New York Times Arts and Leisure section in 1999. Funding for AMD has been provided by: Massachusetts Cultural Council, Cambridge Arts Council, The Foley Hoag Foundation, Turner Family Foundation, and New England Foundation for the Arts. AMD has been presented by Dance Umbrella's Boston Moves (1999), Fleet Bank Celebrity Series (2003), Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (2002, 2003), and CRASHarts at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. The company performed at the 2005 Performing Arts Exchange Conference in Memphis TN. In 2010 Myer was a finalist for the Massachusetts Cultural Council artist Fellowship, and in 2011, AMD received a Choreographic Fellowship from the Boston Dance Alliance.

Anna Myer began her dance training in 1962 with Esther Brooks, at the Cambridge School of Ballet, on a Ford Foundation Scholarship. After receiving scholarships from the Joffrey Ballet, The School of American Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre, Myer joined the Boston Ballet, and later studied and performed with Ane Roje. Myer also performed in works by contemporary choreographers such as Zeve Cohen, Caitlin Corbett, Marguerite Mathews, and Pauline Koner. In 1992, Myer founded Anna Myer and Dancers (AMD), a modern dance company, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Myer has a long history of artistic collaboration, using live music, original scores, as well as incorporating peoples of various ages and backgrounds. Myer came together with neon sculptors Alejandro and Moira Sin to create *Penumbra* (2007). *All At Once* (2005), conducted by Susan Davenny Wyner, featured 9 dancers, 12 musicians, and has been performed by various ensembles including the Julliard Student Ensemble.

Composer **Jakov Jakoulov** was born in Moscow, where he studied in Gnesin Music Academy and Moscow Conservatory as pianist and composer. In 1987 Jakoulov left Moscow to begin to work in Europe, and moved to Boston in 1990.

Since beginning his professional career at age twelve, he has gained considerable experience as both composer

and pianist. He is the author of three ballets, five concertos, five string quartets, scores for over 20 theatrical, TV and cinema productions, as well as numerous symphonic, chamber, and choral works. In recent years his work has been presented by, among others, the London's New European Strings Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Contemporary Music Festival, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's "Future Classics" Series, Boston Symphony Chamber Concerts, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, and the New England String Ensemble.

Jakoulov holds a Doctor of Musical Arts from Boston University, and among his many awards are six Annual Awards from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, and membership in the National Honor Music Society. His composition *Black Snow* was included on a CD that was chosen as one of the "Top Five Classical Recordings of 1999" by *Fanfare Magazine*.

Mark Berger, violinist and violist, has performed with many of the elite ensembles of the Boston area, including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Boston Lyric Opera, Opera Boston, Emmanuel Music, Boston Musica Viva and ALEA III Contemporary Music Ensemble. An avid chamber musician, he is a founding member of the Worcester Chamber Music Society and Music at Eden's Edge, and

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ABOUT THE COLLABORATORS continued..

has performed as a guest artist with QX and the Lydian String Quartets. Mr. Berger has participated in major summer music festivals including the Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival and the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Music Center, where he was in residence for two summers as a member of the New Fromm Players, a chamber ensemble dedicated to the performance of new music. In addition to his work as a performer, Mr. Berger is also a composer, and his works have been commissioned and performed by many leading contemporary music ensembles. Mr. Berger has received degrees from Boston University, and is currently a PhD candidate at Brandeis University.

RAPPERS

New Legends is made up of L-Ski, also known as **Lynn Harris**, who was born in Boston and raised in Grove Hall and Young Cyde, also known as **Anthony Marshall**, who was born and raised in Dorchester. Both have used rap as a way to overcome the experience of living in a community where shootings, drug dealers, and gang members are common. They started rapping at age ten and in their teens formed the rap group New Legends. Their goal is to be signed to a major record label while they are still teenagers.

SPOKEN WORD ARTISTS

Adam Gottlieb is a twenty-one-year-old poet/creator/performer currently studying poetry and education at Hampshire College. He has been performing for seven years throughout festivals, poetry slams, open mics, and other events in his hometown Chicago and well beyond.

He tries his best to use creativity and teaching in the service of humanity. He believes whole-heartedly that artists, poets, dreamers, and creators of all kinds will be the leaders of the coming revolution, and the pioneers of a new world in which love, peace, and justice will reign supreme.

TiElla Grimes is a recent graduate of Newbury College, where she obtained her Bachelors in Communication. She is a member of the Women of Color Roundtable in Roxbury where she studies ways to reduce HIV/AIDS in women of African descent. TiElla was on the Advisory Board for the Girls Grant-making Gathering, which is a part of the Women's Funding Network Annual Conference. TiElla was also on the committee for Raising Women's Voices, a national conference that addresses issues and disparities surrounding women and health care. TiElla is a graduate of the YWCA Boston's Youth Voice Collaborative. Currently she works full time at the YWCA Boston and part time at the Boston Women's Fund as a Young Sister for Justice in Philanthropy. She often volunteers at community events as a spoken word performer.

Tu Phan, inspired by hip hop, spoken word, and literature, has been writing poetry for about three years. His writing focuses on socioeconomic, environmental, political, and spiritual concepts, drawn both from life and people's speech and from his readings in satire, history, and spiritual literature. Tu's spoken word poetry aims to help people change their destructive habits. He lives in Dorchester and is attending Northeastern University.



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ABOUT THE COLLABORATORS continued..

Novana Venerable was born and raised in Oak Park, Illinois. She started writing when introduced to her mentor, Peter Kahn, who is head of the Spoken Word Club and Slam Team. Through working with Peter Kahn, she has had the opportunity to teach high school English classes and lead poetry writing workshops. In high school, Nova participated in *Louder Than A Bomb* and won an all expense paid trip to New York City her sophomore year to compete in Brave New Voices. From there, she was filmed for a documentary called *Louder Than A Bomb* which is currently premiering around the country. Nova spent her first year in college at Illinois State University and transferred to Smith College for her second year where she is majoring in Psychology and double majoring in Spanish. Nova hopes to become a behavioral analyst for the FBI and to continue helping out with *Louder Than A Bomb* as well as teaching workshops to young students.

THE DANCERS

Karina Davis was first inspired by tap dancer Gregory Hines, and started hoofing at Ruth Williams Dance Studio in Harlem, NY. Davis later trained in the Alvin Ailey School's Junior Division, where she studied forms of dance ranging from West African to classical ballet. While attending Williams College, she solidified a love affair with hip-hop by joining the resident dance troupe, Nothin' But Cuties, and was elected president for the 2004-2005 season. In addition to performing student choreography, she maintained her connections to the dance world by studying forms of modern technique under the tutelage of Sandra Burton and Holly Silva and participating in workshops led by performers such as Ron K. Brown, Philadanco, HT Chen & Dancers, and Delfos Danza Contemporanea.

Joe Gonzalez graduated from the Boston Arts Academy and is currently a dance major at the Boston Conservatory. Joe has participated in many summer programs such as the Boston Conservatory and American Dance Festival. He has attended master classes with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Ronald K. Brown, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Sean Curran, Nathan Trice, Pedro Ruiz, Jr., and Jose Limon Dance Company. Outside of school he has broadened his horizons and enjoys musical theater, hip hop, tap, and jazz.

Jeremy Revilock-Frost is a graduate of the University of Hartford's Hartt School with a BFA in Dance Performance. While at Hartt she performed soloist roles in *La Bayadere*, *Guernsey Fields*, and *Martha Graham's Steps in the Street*. She began her dance training in Atlanta, Georgia and then furthered her studies in Portsmouth, New Hampshire under the direction of Mihailo Djuric and Susan Duffy. She danced with Ballet New England and Ballet Theatre Workshop performing principal roles in both classical ballets and Djuric's contemporary pieces. Jeremy-Ruth also trained at the Boston Ballet School and studied at the Martha Graham School in NYC on scholarship. She has danced professionally with Northern Ballet Theatre and Virginia Ballet Theatre. She is on faculty at the Northeast School of Ballet and Walker's Dance.



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ABOUT THE COLLABORATORS continued..

THE DANCERS CONTINUED...

Marissa Molinar comes from a family of Mexican Folkloric dancers, and started learning folklorico from her mother at an early age while growing up in Texas. After moving to Boston and its diverse dance scene, Marissa became enthralled with bharatanatyam, a South Indian dance form, and began training with Aparna Sindhoo. Marissa was introduced to modern dance in high school, studying and performing with Daniel McCusker. After a dance hiatus while earning a degree in Environmental Science from Brown University, Marissa returned to dance and has been performing with many companies and choreographers in the Boston area. Marissa recently joined the fantastic office of Boston Dance Alliance, and she is honored to be performing with the talented crew of Anna Myer And Dancers.

Hieu Nguyen graduated from Boston University, where he was a member of the Dance Theatre Group for two years. After college, Hieu attended the New England School of Law while continuing his dance training, primarily with Anna Myer. Hieu currently works as an attorney specializing in family law and domestic violence prevention. When he is not in the office, Hieu choreographs and consults for several award-winning programs such as the University of Delaware and Shenendehowa High School from Clifton Park, New York. Hieu also adjudicates movement all over the country to help students and programs reach higher standards of excellence. Hieu has been dancing with Anna Myer for two years and is thrilled to be a part of such an amazing project!

Nina Saraceno began her dance training at a four year old at the Ana Roje School of Ballet in Boston, MA, also dancing as a fourth generation Isadora Duncan dancer. She danced with the Boston Dance Company during the late 1990s and joined Anna Myer and Dancers in 2003. She has also danced with Ariel Rifka Dance in New York and Interweave Dance Theatre of Boulder, CO. She has performed works by George Balanchine, José Limón, Robert Battle, Damian Woetzel and Marius Petipa, among others. Nina holds a Bachelors degree from Skidmore College in Psychology and Dance and a certification from the San Francisco School of Massage.

Henoch Spinola is a native of Cape Verde Islands. He began his classical training with Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre, graduating from the Young Dancers Program in 2006, to become a full company member in 2007. He spent one year at the Hartt School, where he danced with Full Force Dance Company, a local contemporary dance company run by Katie Stevenson-Nolet. Henoch has also received training in traditional Malian dance with Sedo Coulibaly of Mali and modern technique with Lacina Coulibaly of Burkina Faso. In 2010, Henoch left Jose Mateo's company to dance with Teatrul de Sibiu of Romania for one season. He has since returned to Boston and has the pleasure of working with Marjorie Folkman, former dancer of the Mark Morris Dance Company.



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VOICES **OF** THE PARTICIPANTS

"I want the audience to feel the impact of this collaboration in what we are saying about our world. I want them to not only hear what we say but to feel and see what we say through the music and the dance."

– Anna Myer, Choreographer

"Rap must be included in the context of our musical culture. Every art has the essence of expression, it doesn't matter whether it's rap or symphony or ballet. It's the quality of how we present it and how we can use it. And it's absolutely fresh and new."

– Jakov Jakoulov, Composer

"We're trying to get heard. This project will let people hear about us more. I hope people will realize: 'Yeah, these are young teenagers trying to do something good, not doing bad.' I want the audience to just be blown away—to say 'wow!'"

– Lynn Harris, Rapper



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ANNA MYER AND DANCERS THE STREET TALK, SUITE TALK PROJECT

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING

“‘Don’t you see?’ the eclectic group seem to be saying. Urban nightmares—betrayal, retaliation, estrangement, confinement—such violence steals all of our lives. The message reverberates.”

– *Thea Singer, The Boston Globe*

“Anna Myer may be the gutsiest choreographer on either side of the Charles River these days. She’s got classicism in her bones yet anything but on her mind: Genre mixing, role reversals, a reach-across-the aisle ‘yes we can’ aesthetic—those are the building blocks of Street Talk Suite Talk.”

– *Thea Singer, The Boston Globe*

“[Anna] Myer seems to look at dance—and life—from a slightly wry but affectionate distance. And what she sees becomes transformed into odd yet affecting imagery ... Ms. Myer is a master weaver, smoothly blending ages and degrees of professionalism in intricately plotted yet simple-seeming dance.”

– *Jennifer Dunning, The New York Times*

“In an evening rich in imagination and musicality, Myer proved she is a creative force to be reckoned with.”

– *Terry Byrne, Boston Globe*

“Behind Anna Myer’s musical dances lies a formalist’s brain and an iconoclast’s heart. ... Her style represents a kind of classicism gone awry: one that concentrates on geometry and tempos and purity of line but is lit by a fierce energy and startling accents.”

– *Thea Singer, Boston Globe*

“Jakoulov is a composer with something urgent to say and an original language to say it in.”

– *The Berkshire Eagle*

“Jakov Jakoulov’s improvisation ... brought the house down with its powerful tone ...”

– *Richard Dyer, Boston Globe*

“Jakov Jakoulov’s Gypsy Requiem ... proved to be a highly original composition with a strong emotional impact.”

– *Olin Chism, Dallas Morning News*

“Anna Myer has proven herself to be a master choreographer who is always full of surprises and new ideas.”

– *Theodore Bale, Bay Windows*

“Choreographer Anna Myer explores heaven on earth. Originality punctuates Myer’s music-filled dance.”

– *Debra Cash, Boston Globe*



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THE BUZZ...

“It’s one thing to read about choreographer Anna Myer’s Street Talk Suite Talk Act I, a piece that wads together a violinist, seven inner-city poet-rappers and 6 avant-garde dancers to explore a urban malaise. It’s quite another to witness the thing yourself. On paper it sounds like an irritating eclectic, overly earnest tangle. But in action you’ll see violinist Mark Berger (playing a restless, nerve-ratcheting score deigned by Moscow composer Jakov Jakoulov) accompanying kids who spit lines about “slowly becoming a restless sleeper” while a mute Greek chorus of dancers pantomimes their words with eerie organic-yet-robotic motions. And somehow, like chocolate covered bacon, It just works.” **-Boston Phoenix, Critic Pick**



Anna Myer may be the gutsiest choreographer on either side of the Charles River these days. She’s got classicism in her bones yet anything but on her mind: Genre mixing, role reversals, a reach-across-the aisle “yes we can” aesthetic - those are the building blocks of ‘Street Talk Suite Talk.

-Thea Singer, The Boston Globe

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-Jennifer Dunning, The New York Times



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REVIEWS **ABOUT THE PROJECT**

The Boston Globe

SATURDAY, MAY 15, 2010

Rap opera is messy and raw, yet rich and powerful

By **Karen Campbell**
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Young urban poets rap about poverty, violence, fear, and loss. A single violin soars rhapsodically or unfurls a dissonant fractured melody. Six dancers create connective tissue in phrases that reflect, underline, or add counterpoint to the theme of chaos, confusion, and redemption on the city streets.

Choreographer Anna Myer calls her new "Street Talk Suite Talk," given its world premiere at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul last night, a rap opera, and that's a pretty fair description for this richly textured, sprawling, and ambitious theatrical work. But as compelling as the finished product is, even more impressive is the collaborative endeavor, bringing together disparate elements like hip hop and ballet, classical violin and rap, into a unified vision.

DANCE REVIEW

**Anna Myer and
Dancers' "Street Talk Suite Talk"**
At: Cathedral Church
of St. Paul. Last night, repeats
this afternoon

Considering all these facets, it's not surprising that "Street Talk Suite Talk" is a bit messy and raw. Two years in the making, this full-evening version is overly long, too busy in spots, and lacks a convincing dramatic arc. But it's chock full of powerful, memorable moments, and it beats with a strong, steady heart and a passionate commitment.

Myer's vigorous, imaginative choreography, grounded in an elegant balletic classicism, is repeatedly skewed with an edgy modernism: abrupt stops and starts, sharp angled limbs, ges-

tures that range from clenched fists and pistol-like fingers to hands clasped in prayer. Quick shifts in direction suggest indecision, confusion. Stiff-legged walks evoke both shackles and regimented authority. The spectacular Joe Gonzalez stands out in athletic, high-energy solos and frequent couplings with Carol Somers.

Some of the poems are revelatory. TiElla Grimes's "Deep-Rooted Reflection" and Tu Phan's "Straightjacket" have a searing immediacy. Others have a musical rhythm all their own, sometimes complemented, other times subverted by Jakov Jakoulov's eloquent score, played beautifully by violinist/violist Mark Berger. Throughout, God is addressed through questions, rebukes, and ultimately praise, as an eight-voice choir leads the audience in a sing-along finale of "Amazing Grace."

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The Boston Globe

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2008

A moving confluence of music, rap, and dance sends a message

By Thea Singer

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Anna Myer may be the gutsiest choreographer on either side of the Charles River these days.

She's got classicism in her bones yet anything but on her mind: Genre mixing, role reversals, a reach-across-the-aisle "yes we can" aesthetic — those are the building blocks of "Street Talk Suite Talk," presented by the City of Boston at the Strand Theatre Saturday.

The afternoon-length confluence of rap poetry, original violin/viola compositions, and Myer's iconoclastic movement style — a kind of cracked-apart ballet littered with shards of modernism — extends her artform-bending "All at Once" (2005), in which Myer and the New England String Ensemble sent movement and music spinning into one another's territory.

That the meshing doesn't always, well, mesh, is almost beside the point. Myer and her collaborators on "Street Talk Suite Talk" — nine local poet-rappers, six dancers, composer Jakov Jakovlov, and violinist/violist Mark Berger — are out to whack our commonality home. You find yourself looking beyond the frequent lack of integration of the elements — say, the dancers, frozen

DANCE REVIEW

ANNA MYER AND DANCERS

Street Talk Suite Talk
Presented by the City of Boston
at the Strand Theatre
Saturday afternoon

upstage in flouncy skirt or red ruffled top), arms reaching downward, while the rappers, in jeans and T-shirts, stand separate, talking. "Don't you see?" the eclectic group seem to be saying. Urban nightmares — betrayal, retaliation, estrangement, confinement — such violence steals *all* of our lives.

The message reverberates. Indeed, that such disparate sensibilities can share a stage and present a polished, meticulously structured work rather than some "night of stars" smorgasbord is a major feat. Yet it's that success that makes you yearn for more of a real conversation between the parties. Then again, it may be the artists' very natures that choke that off. Berger's edgy strings match Myer's cool abstractions well. Among the dancers, rattling fists toss imaginary dice, arms swing stiffly or cut into right angles, a bounding woman



HILL BERTT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Tiella Grimes in Anna Myer's "Street Talk Suite Talk."

is caught, straight as a pipe, in a man's arms, fingers pinch then pull — as if tugging a thread taut. Conversely, the rap is hot, passionate — tales of literal

blood, sweat, and tears fairly shouted to the rafters. "Hopefully I make it to graduation," intones one. "The strength within me fading," says another.

How difficult to make the twain meet.

Sill, there are moments, like flashbulbs popping, when they do: Not just palms but entire forearms, squeezed tight, meet in prayer. A man presses his head into another's chest, communicating embattlement with love. The two forehead a rapper's recollection that "caskets keep passing by," as the second lies supine, and the first hooks an elbow around an elbow to drag his friend along.

Surprisingly, the most integrated — and hence powerful — sequence springs not from a movement or music expert but a spoken-word poet, Tu Plaan. As the Dorchester native releases his chilling, gleaming words, he uses his body as a kinesthetic instrument. He begins in a spotlight center stage, his wrists crossed, plumb the metaphor of hands and arms bound by a straitjacket. The cadence, the never-endingness of the piled-up meanings, grab you by the throat. "Give my fear something else to wear," he says. "Disarm people's arms and legs. . . . Let the sun heal my wrists, let my palms kiss my mother's spine. . . . Even though we have no hands to touch it doesn't mean we don't know how to feel."



PHOTOS BY YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Dancers rehearse for "Street Talk Suite Talk," a new work created by Anna Myer (below) that will be performed at the Strand Theatre in Dorchester.

Taking it to the 'Street'

Choreographer aims to bring blacks, whites together with a work that combines rap, dance, and violin

By Linda Matchan
 GLOBE STAFF

Anna Myer's dances are abstract and subtle, sometimes hard for the uninitiated to get a handle on. The choreographer's audiences aren't huge, and they're predominantly white, professional, and artsy.

It may be surprising, then, that Myer's latest production — "Street Talk Suite Talk," at the Strand Theatre tomorrow — is a collaboration among dancers, composer Jakov Jakoulov, violinist Mark Berger, and hip-hop artists rapping about life in gritty urban neighborhoods.

It's surprising even to the rappers. "At first, I thought, like, 'This project doesn't make any sense to me,'" says Anthony Marshall, 17, a high school senior from Dorchester who has been rapping since he was 10. "Rappers and violins and, like, ballet dancers?"

These are three different things that do *not* go together."

"I have to say, it's a very odd collaboration," concedes Myer, 53, a dance teacher and former dancer with Boston Ballet, who says she knew little about hip-hop until recently. The idea for the piece came to her unexpectedly. One evening about a year ago she was at home watching Hilary Swank in "Freedom Writers," a movie about a teacher in a racially charged school who transformed her students' lives through journal-writing. The next morning Myer woke up with an inspiration for a dance that would include a violinist, a rapper, and a subtext related to race and inequality.

"It just came into my head: boom," she says. "This is how it happens for me. I see what looks like a stage before I know what I want it to look like, and then I



work backward.”

The inspiration for “Street Talk Suite Talk” had actually been incubating since Myer was a teenager in Cambridge during the racial turmoil of the late 1960s. “It was very volatile,” she says. She remembers the day “the whole school flipped out,” when fights broke out on every floor, riot squads came in, and the school was shut down. She remembers watching Martin Luther King’s marches on television and wishing she were in the front lines. “When he died, I was devastated,” she says. “He was one of my heroes.”

Myer was briefly married in the 1980s to an African-American man; a few years after they split up, his 24-year-old son was murdered. “That changed my life dramatically,” she says. “John’s dying really shook up my world.” She stopped dancing, moved to New Hampshire and waitressed for a few months until returning to the Boston area and becoming a choreographer. She founded Anna Myer and Dancers, based in Cambridge, in 1992. She’s now remarried to Andrew Tavarelli, a painter who was her eighth-grade art teacher.

Yet matters of race continued to concern her. “I’ve always been very conscious of the differences and the distance between blacks and whites in this community,” says Myer. “I feel like we stopped somewhere and never grew: There’s a line drawn in the middle of the city, and people don’t mix.”

It occurred to her that the dance she was formulating had the potential to bring black and white communities closer together. She mentioned her idea to Jakov Jakoulov, a Boston composer and pianist who accompanies the ballet classes

STREET TALK SUITE TALK Anna Myer and Dancers

At the Strand Theatre,
Dorchester, tomorrow at 2 and
8 p.m. Free. 617-547-9699, www.annamyeranddancers.org

she teaches in Cambridge; in 2004, they’d collaborated on a well-received New York production, “All At Once,” with dancers and 12 string players from the Juilliard School.

Would he write the music? He didn’t hesitate, though composing for violin and rap artists was, he says, “a pretty bizarre combination.” Next, Myer needed to find rappers. She contacted Anthony Toombs, who does community work with at-risk youth, and asked him for some leads. He suggested Marshall, his wife’s nephew, and Marshall’s cousin, Lynn Harris, both seniors at South Boston High School. Other contacts led to seven more young people including Tu Phan, a Dorchester freshman at Northeastern University who does spoken-word poetry, and TiElla Grimes, a recent graduate of Newbury College.

Myer outlined the themes of the dances she was choreographing — love, anger, death, the feeling of being trapped and constrained in a dangerous world — and asked them to write something for her. “Somehow we all seemed to be on the same page,” she says. Marshall, who describes himself as a typical senior who “goes to school, raps, and basically stays out of trouble,” contributed a fast-paced, breathless rap about a man fleeing the police. “I’m not a violent kid, but growing up in Dorchester I’ve seen a bunch of stuff, violence and

fights,” he says. “It’s everyday life. I can picture it.”

Tu Phan wrote a piece about being in a straitjacket: “*Your second amendment says that I have the right to bear arms but you covered them up with conformity. Why would you do that? I don’t need any guns to avenge this violence you’ve done to me...*”

“The poem is heartwrenching,” says Myer, who dissolved into tears after Phan performed the poem at a rehearsal last week, his hands crossed at the wrist as though bound in a straitjacket, the dancers and rappers encircling him on the floor. “That was intense.”

Jakoulov, who says working with the rap artists has been fascinating, likens their work to blues and spirituals. “It’s the same self-confession, the same lament,” he says. “But here it’s just a musical skeleton, a dehumanized, naked rhythm, with words. These guys are describing their whole lives, and it is extremely tragic.”

Myer hopes to attract a diverse audience to the production, including fans of both hip-hop and dance. (To facilitate this, she’s hosting a series of dinners around Boston before the show, and hiring buses to bring people directly from dinner to the Strand.)

“Some people said I’d never be able to get these communities together,” says Myer. “But I guarantee that with the intensity of the dance, the sadness of the violin, and the expressiveness of these stories it will be very intense and very effective. I don’t question my vision of that.”

BEHIND THE SCENES

See video of rehearsal at boston.com/ae/theater_arts.



YOON S. HYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Anthony Marshall (left) and Lynn Harris, two rappers in “Street Talk Suite Talk,” at a rehearsal for the piece.

For information about Street Talk Suite Talk
or about bringing the program to your community,
call 617.513.9314 or visit: www.annamyeranddancers.org
annamyerdancers@gmail.com