



The Chronicle

Spotlight on choreographer Mark Dendy American Dance Festival

Issue date: 7/1/09 Section: [Recess](#)

Last update: 7/1/09 at 12:53 PM EST

New York choreographer Mark Dendy returns to the American Dance Festival with two new site-specific performances. His second piece, Golden Belt, utilizes about 12,000 square feet of the lobby, bathroom, upper floor and stairwells in the recently renovated Golden Belt complex. recess' Sanette Tanaka recently discussed the piece with Dendy.

recess: Why did you choose Golden Belt as the site of your dance?

Mark Dendy: I came to Durham looking around for spaces. A friend of mine is a painter and has a studio here at Golden Belt, which was an old textile factory that made packaging for cigarettes. Later, the areas were turned into galleries, office space and lofts. I got a tour of the place and just fell in love with it. The upstairs room has windows and columns and beams; it's a very open space and begging to be choreographed for. I walked into this room and I said, "I want to choreograph a dance in here." The space just speaks to me—its history, its architecture, its upper room. Also, with the utilization of ADF students and local dancers augmenting my company, it's a great way to get as many people involved in the community as possible.



Media Credit: Special to The Chronicle
Mark Dendy

R: Where do you get your inspiration for your dances?

MD: My inspiration comes a great deal from the site-specific works that I've previously been involved in, like Ruby Shang's The Small Wall Project in 1984. That was a great influence on me in the use of architecture and the use of landscaping because that becomes your partner on stage. It takes dance back to its original function as a ritual, as opposed to a separate performer-and-audience manner.

R: Why do you continue to perform at ADF year after year?

MD: I have this wonderful relationship with ADF. It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing that you get with an organization. The American Dance Festival is also where I learned so much about dance when I was a student here. The first summer I came here, there must have been at least 15 different ways of working

that I was exposed to, both in performances and in classes. I also met the first three choreographers I worked with here at ADF. That helped me with my transition from college student to professional because I was already connected. And I can trace that deep and emotional connection all the way back to the start of my career. It just keeps renewing itself.

R: You're famous for daring and energetic dances at site-specific works. What's different about this year's performance at ADF?

MD: This next piece goes along with the progression of my work. I've done lots of site-specific works--the Kennedy Center in D.C. and two site-specific works at ADF. Golden Belt is building on that legacy. The difference, though, is the amount of movement and new vocabulary for this new group of dancers I've been working with. Even so, every site-specific piece is unique because the space dictates your limits and your possibilities. It's kind of like working with a composer to create music because you're working with the space and the architecture to collaborate on a piece. These kinds of dances will always be different according to the site that inspires them.

R: What can we expect at your performance?

MD: You can expect the usual audience-performance relationship--broken in half by a stage--to be gone. You're right with the dancers, three feet away and breathing the same air. There is no "us and them." It's just us, you know what I mean? Everybody is an "us." It kind of takes away the subject-object relationship and makes it subject-subject. We want everyone to come out. This piece is definitely made for the community.

Golden Belt will be performed Friday, July 17 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, July 18 at 2 p.m. in Golden Belt's Building 2, Floor 3. Shows are free and open to the public.