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**Author**

Wyper, Allison

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# "Keeping Up with the (Gender) Narrative" *Faye Driscoll's Choreography Residency*

*by Allison Wyper*



**Faye Driscoll and Jesse Zaritt perform "You're Me" at UCLA's intimate Gloria Kaufman Dance Theater. Photos by Lilian Wu.**

## DURING DRISCOLL'S RESIDENCY AT UCLA, STUDENTS GET TO LIVE FOR A FEW DAYS IN THE FANTASTICAL WORLD OF FAYE DRISCOLL'S PROCESS, LEARNING FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

**F**AYE DRISCOLL is an energetic, voraciously curious, genre-bending dance-theater maker who is changing the landscape of concert dance. Though she has only been making original work since 2005, the New York-based dancer and Los Angeles native has already been identified as “one of 25 to watch out for” by *Dance Magazine*, and was awarded a New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” award for her autobiographical work “837 Venice Boulevard”. She was the perfect person, therefore, to launch the Residency Program for Movement (RPM), a new initiative by the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance designed to bring outstanding young choreographers to UCLA and Los Angeles. Under the leadership of renowned choreographer

and WACDance professor Victoria Marks, the pilot venture of the residency initiative took place from April 23 to May 5, 2012.

The residency began with two master classes for area high-school dance students and a spectacular performance of Driscoll's newest work “You're Me” at WACDance's own state-of-the-art Glorya Kaufman Dance Theater (April 26 and 27). “You're Me” is a duet performed by Driscoll and dancer Jesse Zaritt that (in the words of the choreographer) “probes and obfuscates the inescapable nature of relationships as the contemporary, archetypal, fantastical and personal crash into each other, bending and warping in one shrug, quarrel, or reframing of a scene.... Sliding from the everyday to the uncanny and bizarre, [the]

choreography poses questions about the slippery nature of self and other.”

In the dance, Driscoll and Zaritt play a game of identity dress-up, putting on and shedding one iconic image after another, with and without the aid of props such as wigs, fake beards, bras, and the like. In the opening image, the two stand as living statues in a messily baroque Hieronymus Bosch-esque tableau vivant, swathed from head to toe in lengths of bright fabric, clutching fruit, feathers, and fake silicone breasts. As the audience takes their seats, the dancers begin glacially shedding their props. A dancer shrugs and a string of pearls hits the empty stage floor, followed by an orange. Once they've discarded their vestments, Driscoll and Zaritt begin a shape-shifting game of gender





**Faye Driscoll and  
Jesse Zaritt perform  
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Kaufman Dance  
Theater. Photos by  
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**Choreography workshop for UCLA students with Faye Driscoll**

play, evoking classical painting and MTV, voguing and National Geographic. At times tender, at times antagonistic, they feed one another, preen and mug for the audience, present one another, and practice (usually unsuccessfully) being romantic. The piece is an exhausting and captivating 90-minute spectacle that ends with a sweat- and body paint-drenched Driscoll staring at the audience as if asking for approval.

Staring back at her, and at Zaritt in the background miming for us to applaud for her, I became aware of the voraciousness of my gaze, the imperative for me to confirm or affirm the offering of the dancers, to answer the question Driscoll and Zaritt seem to ask us again and again: “Am I getting it right?”

For the second half of the residency, I join a dozen grad and undergrad students from WACDance and Theatre, Film and Television in a six-day intensive workshop on Driscoll’s choreographic process that produced “You’re Me”, among other works. In the dance studio, our exploration begins with sourcing movement from imagery, and vice versa. Faye invites us to explore physical states through memory and fantasy. Day one starts with embodiment of gendered and non-gendered identities. The premise of these exercises is that images of “Man” and “Woman” live in our bodies, sourced from popular culture, myth and memory. They live in the form of stereotype, taboo, cliché, and archetype. They

have shapes, postures, ways of moving, and they make sounds and sometimes form words.

In a linear pathway, we move across the floor in groups of three, embodying “Man”, then “Woman”, then “Creature”. As “Creature” we morph from one chimera to another, imagining bizarre, never-before-identified bodies growing inside our own and breaking out. We explode with sound and energy. Faye tells us to tune in to the feeling of the movement, the vibrations. She tells us to “perform”—and performance gives us a particular energy and focus that she calls “alchemy”. Then she tells us to break out of our lines and fill the space, performing “Self, Ungendered”, that is, if You were never assigned a gender, how that You moves, sounds, and vibrates.

We play with the collective creation of narrative, and by narrative, Faye is talking more about relationship than story. Meaning emerges from movement, from accidental relationships, from liveness and responsiveness within the group. Narrative is a product of collective creation, and it is never fixed. Borrowing from various modalities including Authentic Movement, we practice seeing each other and being seen. We practice witnessing and re-performing each other’s dances. We make note of changes and shifts in meaning, relationship, tension, release, and tone as we discover, perform, and re-perform sequences of movement.

“I’m interested in challenging the idea of one essential self... the stories I tell myself in the morning to keep up with that narrative,” Faye tells us as we sit in a circle digesting the exercises. She speaks frequently of fantasy and the surprising emergence of associational meaning and non-linear narrative that comes from movement. How do we recognize that these ideas of gendered bodies, gender representation, and the relationships between gendered bodies live in us, without reifying them? How do we keep a critical perspective?

As we practice intersubjectivity, we open our bodies to become conduits of cultural information as well as creators of new possibilities of relationship and meaning. In our bodies gendered identities lose some of their fixedness. We play, we laugh, we become our mothers, our demons, our child selves. And as students of choreography and performance, we get to live for a few days in the fantastical world of Faye Driscoll’s process, learning from the inside out.

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**Allison Wyper (MFA Dance, 2011) is an interdisciplinary performance artist and assistant producer of the 2012 Residency Program for Movement at the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance.**