

## *World Headquarters*

### Notes from the Choreographer, Charles O. Anderson

#### What's the story of *World Headquarters*?

I tend to call *World Headquarters* a 'sci-fi kinetic tale' inspired by Octavia Butler's novels *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* or a sci-fi dance theatre study in the survival of the fittest. What I think is obvious about the work is that it is dealing speculative fiction and that is definitely dance theatre. *World Headquarters* is ultimately about being moved (both literally and metaphorically)...to action, to prayer, to make positive change, to care...when "democracy" and "justice" do not prevail. *World Headquarters* explores the premise of what if the forces set in motion in the historical past, especially America's, are a tide that has overwhelmed the present and doomed the future to suffering and disaster, with a redemption and salvation of a very private and individual kind arising in the lives of the few who are patient and passionate and truthful enough to believe such survival is possible.

#### What about Octavia Butler's book *Parable of the Sower* inspired you to craft this work?

I think it is important for me to state that *World Headquarters* is not dance adaptation of Ms. Butler's novels; it operates in a kind of parallel universe to Ms. Butler's books exploring similar themes and concepts. *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* predict and then respond to the rise of an age of terrorism in America, a terrorism that threatens the current social order. I was inspired by the way in which Ms. Butler's characters are set in a near future in which civilization is disintegrating and culture is descending to savagery and the idea of hyperempathy. The books made me ask the question: Is it possible for everyone to have the same idea of what makes a utopia or dystopia?. I am inspired to try to answer it...

## **What is your choreographic process and practices? Have you shifted this process for World Headquarters?**

Generally my work tends to deal in large and complicated themes- identity, race, and community and belonging- that have no easy answers. I approach my work as kinetic storytelling and in terms of movement, I think of myself as a contemporary choreographer who works interculturally- drawing upon western and African aesthetics and movement forms. Growing up African American in Richmond, Virginia, and spending childhood summers on my grandfather's farm further south, I was immersed in Southern storytelling, blues music and churchgoing traditions. It is this upbringing that has informed my approach to choreography as metaphor for testimony. Testimony is the declaration of truth integral to the Southern African-American oral and literary tradition, going back to the slave narrative and folk practices. Testimonies can give praise and they can boast. They can also attest to suffering and injustice but their goal is always to move the audience. It is a form of story-telling based on the personal truth(s) of the teller(s). It is used to allow the storyteller to connect with those who hear the testimony, as well as to a higher plane of being. With World Headquarters, I have challenged myself to develop a collaborative kinetic storytelling process with the dancers. They are telling their own stories within the context of the story of World Headquarters.

## **What excites you about the project? What themes are you investigating?**

I am excited about working with an amazing group of performers and artistic collaborators on while investigating the idea social transformation.

Initially the dancers, playwright/actor, Troy Dwyer, visual artist Amze Emmons and I came together to investigate the theme of discovery of self through ordeals of violence. Now, I'd say the piece is as much about investigating passionate bonds forged by love. It feels great to work with a group of artists who are all excited about developing a work of massive biblical, spiritual, and socio-political resonance.

**What excites you about premiering this work in Seattle? What do you want Philadelphia audiences to get out of the piece? What excites you about partnering with the Painted Bride on this project?**

What Philly audiences will be seeing is not a 'definitive' version or final product of WHQ...It is still evolving and growing even as we are now touring and performing it. I am really invested in bringing to the forefront the process that informs WHQ and engaging audiences in a dialogue around notions of 'tradition' and cultural evolution.

I am interested in inverting audience's expectations, challenging them to examine their own assumptions and instincts (about dance, about society, about how race functions in their understanding of the world, etc.), to perceive how they might identify with and even become the alienator, dominator, and oppressor even when they subscribe to the idea of freedom and democracy. With World Headquarters I am challenging the audience to consider hope and possibilities in a societal context that devalues and actively denies diverse expressions of hope and possibility. I am challenging my dancers, my audiences and myself to think about how well we understand ourselves and how we may all at times be at fault in the inherent cruelty of the human story- even as we find ourselves to be subjects of that cruelty ourselves.

I am excited to premiere the work in Philly in partnership with the Painted Bride because of my previous work with them. I am also very grateful to the National Performance Network for the funding to make this partnership possible. Since I began dtX, the Bride has been hugely supportive of my work and the themes of the work. The audiences that come to see my work there always blow me away with how well the work is received- and not just because it is highly physical. People actually notice and want to engage with the themes that inform the physicality and virtuosic movement. It is a blessing to engage with and work with fellow artists who appreciate that dance can and should be a site for social change and promoting issues of social justice.