

June 4-10, 2009

Edited by Gia Kourlas
dance@timeoutnyc.com

Dance



BEWITCHED Non Griffiths photographed in Cardiff, is part of the enchantment of *Dover Beach*.

MOVE IT!

Read the complete interview with Sarah Michelson at timeoutnewyork.com/dance.

A shore thing

In *Dover Beach*, Sarah Michelson casts another spell on the Kitchen.
By **Gia Kourlas**

For her new *Dover Beach*, Sarah Michelson focuses on "a subtle examination of the development of a dance style within a particular culture." All true—but it's actually more enthralling than that. Created over two years in Cardiff, Wales (in a series of short residencies at Chapter Arts), and in another stint in New York, the work—for a cast of 12 including young girls and featuring an original score by Pete Drungle—is Michelson's most lucid foray into pure movement. There is a set, created with her longtime collaborator Parker Lutz, but this time, it's the dance that matters. Michelson, a 2009 Guggenheim recipient, spoke about the work at her Brooklyn apartment.

You first traveled to Cardiff in early 2007 after your first hip surgery. What were your plans?

There was absolutely no expectation. So I was in this town with crutches, where it rained every day—and I had no idea. At Chapter Arts, there was a flyer for a ballet class and I asked permission to watch it. It was freezing cold—always—at Chapter Arts, and I didn't want to leave. It had something to do with the fascinating thing of watching the archetypal movements of ballet and these children who didn't yet know what they were. On the second trip back, I was introduced to some girls who started to do bits and pieces with me. I was excited, but it was really the third trip when I discovered the connection between Laura Weston [of *Dogs*] and Non Griffiths. And it was just with some very simple movements, but I could feel it.

Was it physical?

It was physical and tonal. It was the tone that they had in relationship to effort and my movements. In some way or another, there's a huge amount of effort in them, which isn't always obvious. I

"What is a good dance? What is a bad dance? What is a bad dance? I should ask Shen Wei."

think I'm the queen of making movements that look like they're not hard but are really the hardest thing in the world to do. I also think that there's a way, when you look at someone's face—slash-being when they're trying to accomplish the task of one of these movements, that is crucial. There's something that I'm looking for—it's a kind of attitude, a personality trait in

relationship to difficulty that has a tone. It has a temperature. It's kind of cool.

In *Dover Beach*, you address the way dancers phrase your movement by maintaining that each movement be executed individually. In doing so, you also create a specific rhythm. Why is that appealing?

All along I've been trying to understand whether or not I'm a choreographer. Is it when you are able to stage a concept and fulfill it, or does it have to be the making of movements—and, if so, what's the relationship of the dance with the movement? They were deep, inarticulate questions for a while, and I think they have to do with ownership. In the studio, it's a fervent desire to see movement done in a certain way and that turns out to be pure. *Dover Beach* has become a deep study in how to make and execute movement that can exist free of any extraneous rhythmic interpretation or any history in the dancer's body. I fail, but that's part of the experiment because it is very, very, very hard.

Can you give me a sense of how you guide them through the choreography in the studio?

Well, I'm trying to do a couple of things: One is working on the movements. It's intense work. And then I'm trying to understand what the purpose is. There's all this choreography and all these movements—so what? And then how does that make a dance piece? Every time, that's the question. What is a good dance? What is a bad dance? I have no idea. [Mutters] I should ask Shen Wei.

How has the piece changed since Wales?

Well, there's a whole load of New York dancers in it that shifts the shape of it completely. Why did I bring *Dover Beach* from Cardiff to here? Or why didn't I just make a show with some New York dancers? Because I'm an asshole! Because I want to kill myself! *Dover Beach* was really perfect in Cardiff; I thought it was very beautiful and I thought I did a really good job with those girls. I wanted to give them the opportunity to come to New York. But for some reason, I just can't stop. How can I challenge myself more? I guess that's what I did. I always risk ruining everything by making it harder.

Dover Beach is at the Kitchen Tue 9–June 13.