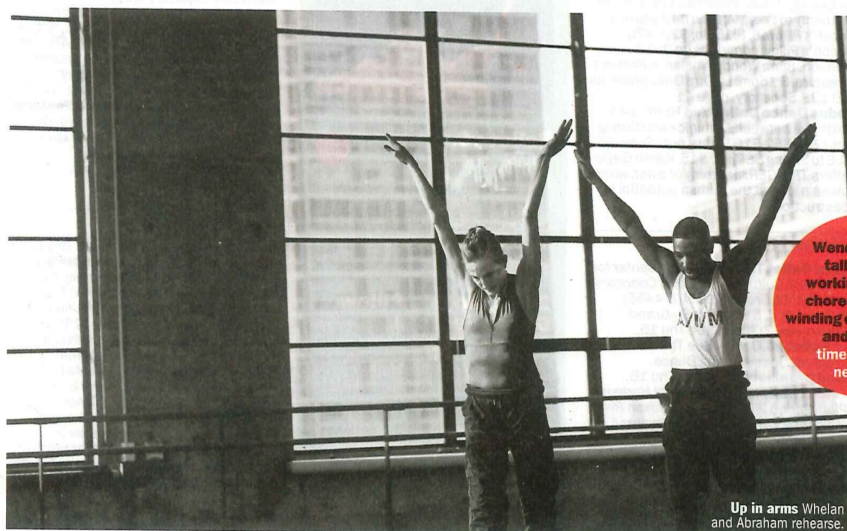


Time Out New York

August 8-14, 2013

Dance



Up in arms Whelan and Abraham rehearse.

want?" I said, "You can ease up on the challenge part, Kyle."

Why are there no female choreographers?

Initially those four were the first that popped out. I didn't intentionally seek a woman, and then I realized I hadn't, and I thought maybe I made a mistake by not going there. At the same time, it felt right to me to just use men. I needed a certain comfort level, and I found that working with men for right now. It's not my goal to constantly work with men, and I'm eager for the woman-to-woman connection that will happen, but I'm physically and emotionally not ready for that. I haven't had a woman mentor really ever; they've always been men, and I just find comfort in that. And I wanted these duets to have some kind of thing that I could really respond to in that man-woman way.

Wendy Whelan talks about working with her choreographers, winding down at NYCB and more at timeout.com/newyork.

Wendy Whelan

The ballerina breaks free with *Restless Creature*. By **Gia Kourlas**

Wendy Whelan may not feel like a ballerina. Maybe that's why she is the exemplar of one. The New York City Ballet principal is synonymous with some of the most scintillating developments in ballet in recent years—namely, her collaborations with choreographers Christopher Wheeldon and Alexei Ratmansky. As angular and strong as she is, Whelan also has a spooky, spiritual side; both choreographers, drawn into her world, have made some of their best work. Now that their careers have pulled them away from NYCB, Whelan is looking for inspiration elsewhere. In *Restless Creature*, which is at Jacob's Pillow this week and will be at the Joyce as part of a multicity tour in April, Whelan hooks up with four choreographers—Kyle Abraham, Joshua Beamish, Brian Brooks and Alejandro Cerrudo—for a show of her own design.

How did you get the idea for *Restless Creature*?

It's hard to pinpoint it being one specific time, because little things

spiraled into this. Working with Peter Boal was big. As soon as I got into NYCB, Peter Martins was bringing in contemporary choreographers. Laura Dean chose me when I was 19 to be her No. 1 corps girl. I worked with [William] Forsythe, Ulysses Dove, Twyla Tharp—you name it. That just opened me up and laid the fertilizer for this.

What influenced you more recently?

My husband [David Michalek] did *Slow Dancing* in 2007. Seeing the lineup that he chose: the varied cultures of dance, the ages, the ethnicities, the styles, the backgrounds of everybody and then seeing them line up literally on screens—you'd see Trisha Brown with Lil' C, the krumper, next to Bill T. Jones. I wanted to make that chemistry onstage with varied choreographers.

How did you come across Kyle Abraham?

I'd seen Kyle for years. I was flabbergasted by him as a performer. I think of watching a flickering flame—you just never know what it's going to do, and it's so beautiful and so hot and

passionate and intense, and I thought, God, I would give anything to feel what that feels like.

How do you want to look in these pieces?

He actually asked me, "What do you want from me?"

My main thing with him was that I wanted a transformation. I've wanted that through this whole process. The first day of rehearsal, he gave me so much material. I was really intimidated, and I thought, Wendy, you actually bit off more than you can chew. Then we sat down after a couple of hours and he said, "Are you getting the challenge you

“I would give anything to feel what that feels like.”

It's strange, because women really respond to you onstage, right?

And I'm a real woman's woman. Also, strangely—I'm 46. There's a weird sexuality that's strong and potent that I feel, and I want to put it out there. I feel that with a man, gay, straight, whatever—that thing comes alive, and I knew it was going to be something I wanted to feel.

It's all in the title.

Having been a ballerina for 29 years, you get to where you're either restless for more or you're ready to stop.

Why did you put air quotes around *ballerina*?

[Laughs] I have never really felt like a ballerina. I've been a ballerina since I've been four in my living room, but that's an imaginary thing. It doesn't live forever, and it's not really real; it's a gorgeous thing to feel, but reality is reality. I can't be a ballerina for my whole life. But I am a dancer. I can be a dancer for my whole life.

Restless Creature is at Jacob's Pillow through Sun 18.