



Wendy Osserman Dance Company premieres

COMBUSTION

March 11-14, 8 p.m.

Presented by Theater for the New City

Crystal Field, Executive Director • 155 1st Avenue, New York, NY



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COMBUSTION

Wendy Osserman's latest work meets fire with fire

Fire is a recurrent image embodied by the dancers in *Combustion*, a new piece for five. As she attempts to digest inflammatory statements and actions by our President and his followers, Osserman – like many of us – has felt consumed with worry, shock, anger and a need to make sense of current events. President Trump appears caught in his reality TV role as he fires his collaborators and fumes and lashes out at any opposition. At the same time we are witnessing the destructive power of wildfires in California and elsewhere in the world, self-combustion due to creeping climate change, deforestation, and poor working conditions in third-world countries.

As in past works, Osserman identifies with what concerns her – war, the

depleted earth, polarization in politics, fascist leaders – and physicalizes her response. As she performs her distress, humor emerges as a welcome side effect, surprising and palliative. In her collaboration with the dancers, fire is also recognized as a generator of life, an agent of transformation, purification, illumination and enlightenment. The unusual contributions of composer, musician and musical instrument creator Skip La Plante will again delight the dancers and the audience.

Udjat, a trio from 1985, concludes the program with “a darkness that is both powerful and compelling” (*Attitude: The Dance Magazine*). *Udjat* is the Egyptian hieroglyph of the Sacred Eye, a symbol of completeness, of things made more precious having been restored.



About the Company

“Blessedly nonliteral” choreography — *The New York Times*

Osserman and her dancers celebrate the strangeness of being alive. They relish a collaborative process which includes improvisation, writing, reading contemporary poetry, articles on science and other news. The choreography explores the many sides of our personalities and relationships. The Company values its collaborations with musicians and composers such as Iva Bittová, Skip La Plante, Harry Mann, Victor Lewis, and Concetta Abbate and visual artists including Illya Azaroff, Charles Hinman, Sarah Olson, Ken Laser and Sanya Kantarovsky.

Influenced by her experience working with Kei Takei’s *Moving Earth* in the ’70s, Osserman enjoys finding tasks for herself and the dancers. These border on the impossible, such as trying to touch while not wanting to be touched and the reverse; the attempt generates movement that is authentic as well as metaphorical. Osserman conveys her struggle to comprehend current events and history with drama and humor, fusing the personal with the political.

“Comic... scary...effectively evoked
the mood of our time.” — *The New York Times*

A life in dance: Wendy Osserman



Performance highlights

WENDY OSSERMAN DANCE COMPANY has been presented since 1976 in most NYC dance venues including 92nd Street Y, DanceNow Joe's Pub, BAC, Dixon Place, DTW, Joyce SoHo, Symphony Space, La MaMa, and Theater for the New City. WODC has toured nationally and internationally, performing and teaching in colleges, schools, and festivals.

Highlights include:

- two evening-length works created in collaboration with Iva Bittová, celebrated Czech composer/performer, 2008 & 2009
- Scriabin's 5th Symphony commissioned by Lumiatra for Baryshnikov Arts Center
- 30th Annual John Lennon Tribute, Beacon Theater, 2010
- site-specific scores at Chelsea Art Museum, 2006-2011
- 40th anniversary season of WODC at Theater for the New City, where the company has appeared regularly over the past decade.

Growing up in New York City, Wendy Osserman studied many dance forms including modern with Martha Graham, José Limón, Betty Jones and others and choreography with Louis Horst, Anna Sokolow, Bessie Schönberg, Robert Ellis Dunn, and Martha Myers. After performing as a soloist with Valerie Bettis, Alice Condodina, Kei Takei, Frances Alenikoff, the Hellenic Chorodrama, S.I.T.U., and in two festivals she created on the island of Paros, Greece, she launched Wendy Osserman Dance Company in 1976.

Osserman has choreographed over 17 full-length pieces as well as many shorter works in collaboration with outstanding dancers. She was featured in *Dancing Divas* at La MaMa; *Women in Dance at 92 Y: History in the Making Anniversary Special*; *From The Horse's Mouth*, Rebecca Stenn & Company; *Theater Within* and *My Inner Sole*, conceived and directed by Zuzka Kurtz.

Always taking the political personally, Osserman strives to understand historical and current events with the entirety of her body and often includes text. Humor emerges from the sincerity and intensity of her feeling. During the Iraq war, she confessed during a solo that she had intended to perform a peace dance but – wanting to torture the torturers and kill the killers – it morphed into a war on war dance. Currently, she finds fire an appropriate element for her dancers to embody.

Osserman earned a B.A. in theater from Smith College and a M.A. from New York University. Honors include the Lawrence S. Epstein Choreography Award in 1991 and the 2004 Gallatin Arts Festival Award from NYU. She has taught dance at numerous schools and universities and creates original dance theater work in North Carolina, where she spends half the year. She is featured in *A Life in Dance: A Practical Guide* by Rebecca Stenn and Fran Kirmser.

“Osserman may be inspired by current events, but she’s a timeless rather than topical artist, and perhaps that’s why she has lasted so long.” — Leigh Witchel, *dancelog.nyc*



“If I were a choreographer, I’d envy Osserman for her smashing ensemble... performers who infuse each work with intelligence, committed presence, and palpable meaning. They are the right dancers for Osserman’s sculptural, expressionistic poetry.”
— Eva Yaa Asantewaa

Meet the Dancers

CORI KRESGE is a NYC-based dance artist, writer, and teacher. She graduated from SUNY Purchase with a BFA in dance and has been a member of the Merce Cunningham Repertory Understudy Group, José Navas/Compagnie Flak, and Stephen Petronio Company. Kresge collaborates and performs with various artists including Rashaun Mitchell+Silas Riener, Rebecca Lazier, Hanna Novak, Xavier Cha, Esmé Boyce, Sarah Skaggs, Wendy Osserman, Bill Young, Liz Magic Laser, School for Poetic Computation, and filmmakers Zuzka Kurtz, Alla Kovgan, and Charles Atlas. She won the 2019 No, Dear/Small Anchor Press chapbook contest for her debut poetry collection, *isn't devotion*. She teaches dance at various institutions and is a certified Zero Balancing bodyworker. She has danced with Wendy Osserman Dance Company since 2003.



“Ms. Kresge has advanced from highly impressive to extraordinary...she whips across the space with an amazing combination of absolute control and reckless speed. There’s a cheekiness to how poised she is in seemingly impossible balances, how at ease in high-torsion co-ordinations of limbs.” — *The New York Times*



GARY CHAMPI is a freelance dancer based in New York. He works on a project basis with Ian Spencer Bell, Dusan Tynek Dance Theatre, and Bill Young. Champi worked as a guest artist with the Stephen Petronio Company and Robert Moses’ Kin, and has also performed with Michael Mao Dance, H.T. Chen & Dancers, Ellen Cornfield, and in special projects with the Merce Cunningham Trust. He was an assistant stager in a Cunningham Interscape workshop and also works as the Trust’s administrative assistant. He holds a degree in cognitive science from Stanford University and teaches hip hop and choreographs. He joined Wendy Osserman Dance Company in 2017.

LAUREN FERGUSON earned her BFA at the Conservatory of Dance at SUNY Purchase and performed as a guest with Merce Cunningham’s Repertory Understudy Group. She has danced in works by David Gordon, Bill Young, Cori Kresge, and Esme Boyce, among others. Ferguson has also performed experimental theater with Goat Rocket Productions and appeared in The Public Theater’s Shakespeare In The Park Production of *All’s Well That Ends Well*. She is a licensed massage therapist and is enjoying her eighth season with Wendy Osserman Dance Company.



“Ms. Osserman has been creating dances since the early 1970s... the work is provocative precisely because it feels like a new amalgam of some indefinable kind.” — *The New York Times*



JOSHUA TUASON is a dance artist and teacher originally from San Francisco, where he began his training at the San Francisco Ballet. He earned a BFA from Marymount Manhattan Collage. Tuason was a member of the Martha Graham Ensemble and has participated in various events through the Merce Cunningham Trust including the centennial production *Night of 100 Solos* at BAM. A member of Stephen Petronio Company from 2009-2017, he currently freelances and has collaborated with various artists including Yvonne Rainer, Mark Morris, Ian Spencer Bell, Ellen Cornfield, Sally Silvers, Pam Tanowitz, and Oliver Herring. He joined Wendy Osserman Dance Company in 2016.

EMILY VETSCH, a dancer/puppeteer/director/choreographer, hails from Sun Valley, Idaho. She studied dance at Ballet Idaho, NCSA, and SUNY Purchase (BFA). In addition to WODC, Vetsch has had the pleasure of working with Labrynth Dance Theater, The Hudson Vagabond Puppets, Jeff Davis Dance, The Marcos Duran Performance Group, NYC Children’s Theater, No. 11 Productions, TNC, Cori Kresge, Elliot Roth, Cuddle Magic, Tai Dang, and Michael Weiner among other talented people and organizations. She co-directs *Glitter Kitty Productions*, est. 2011, and recently produced a three week festival of dance, theater and music presented by Theater for the New City. This will be her seventh season with Wendy Osserman Dance Company.



SKIP LA PLANTE serves as musical director, composer, and musician for Wendy Osserman Dance Company. He has composed for over 100 modern dance and theater presentations including collaborating with Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard on *Tongues/Savage Love*. In 1975 he co-founded Music for Homemade Instruments, an ensemble dedicated to creating and composing for new and unusual instruments, often made from trash and other found objects. One of New York City’s leading microtonalists, La Plante has built instruments and composed for alternative tuning systems such as Harry Partch’s 43 pitch per octave tuning. With the ensemble Bash The Trash, La Plante has shown hundreds of thousands of students how and why musical instruments sound as they do. A teaching artist at New York City’s Materials for the Arts, which receives donations of unwanted items from corporations and makes the items available to teachers and artists.

He has explored both non-western music – living in Indonesia for two years to study musical performance and gamelan building – and music in the European tradition, working with Milton Babbitt as his college thesis advisor. La Plante spends considerable time backpacking and has mined that experience for compositional ideas. He has collaborated with Wendy Osserman Dance Company for the last seven years.

“The sonorous music, by La Plante and Abbate, played on everything from violins to refrigerator bins, was a huge asset.” — *dancelog.nyc*

More quotes

“Osserman finds cosmic implications in personal experience.” — *The Village Voice*

“One piece stands out particularly, a solo that joins dance to stand-up comedy, containing the artist’s utterly savory soliloquy and as much physicality as you could wish for. It is as if Lou Reed had been a choreographer.” — *ICI Montreal*

“Osserman, alone in a spotlight, starts twisting, kicking, and clawing, as if the beast in her were taking over. It takes a while to realize that what she’s growling out and licking her chops over is ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’ No more Ms. Nice Choreographer. Powerful stuff. You go girl!” — *The Village Voice*

“the piece seemed primal, raw. It built up and seemed like something was going to explode. I want to see it again.” — *HOUR online, Montreal*

“Superb...Osserman creates a delicate hybrid of the old and the new.” — *The Boston Herald*

“Wendy Osserman’s *Udjat* and *Revertebrata* both feature sculptural images and a quirky contortionist sensibility that is oddly appealing...Osserman’s movement transposes the sensual physicality of Latin dance rhythms into something very different, forcing us to look at it with new eyes.” — *The Pittsburgh Press*

“Wendy Osserman winds her dancers around each other, like restrained acrobats supporting their partners. The dancers appeared to be born, to meld, to form a totem pole.” — *The Daily News (McKeesport, PA)*

“*Karaktura*, a solo performed by Osserman herself, used ordinary and extraordinary movements to interject a fresh and inventive style. . . The Wendy Osserman Dance Company not only gave an anniversary performance. It also introduced an avant-garde style of dance to the Washington area.” — *THE EAGLE, Washington D.C.*

“A kinetic sculptress...This lady’s a remarkable performer...innovative and with an ability to make phrases appear freshly minted and gleaming.” — *The Jewish Journal*

“Osserman has been making eccentric and original work since the nineteen-seventies.” — *The New Yorker*

“Repeatedly the kind of support on view defines the emotional relationship depicted between the performers. In formal terms this seems to be Ms. Osserman’s governing idea and it is a sophisticated concept...These are studies in emotion as well as motion...a welcome fresh note.” — *The New York Times*

“program of well-made expressionistic dances...(a) winning evening” — *Backstage*

“A woman of taste and talent...She comes up with some fine images...Osserman is splendid in *State*, making us see invisible forces tugging at her steps.” — *The Village Voice*

“Wendy Osserman is an engaging actor and dancer who moves with elfin lightness.” — *The New York Times*

“Osserman is possessed of surprising lyricism... The entirety of Osserman’s work was so finely orchestrated...the fullness of feeling made the fullness of the Dance.” — *Dance Magazine*

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More quotes (continued)

Undermine

Presented March 2018 by Theater for the New City, Crystal Field, Executive Director, 155 First Avenue, NYC

“The veteran choreographer Wendy Osserman unveils her latest evening of work – with a group of talented dancers, including Joshua Tuason and Cori Kresge – that features the premiere of ‘Undermine.’ Inspired by the current political climate, it draws on concepts from the Native American medicine wheel and features music by Skip LaPlante, who creates scores for traditional and homemade instruments. Also included is ‘Udjat,’ a trio from 1985.” – *New York Times*

“It had the shifting, crepuscular feeling of something you caught a glimpse of in half-light, down the hall, reflected in a mirror.” – *Dance Log*

Quick Time, 40th Anniversary Season

Presented April 2016, presented by Theater for the New City, 155 First Avenue, NYC

“bountiful work, richly textured with visual, aural, and physical collaborations. Projected designs by Sanya Kantarovsky, lively arrangements of color and shape reminiscent of Matisse’s cut outs, set a scene. Each projection brings to light a new environment making the stage into an ever-changing forest of sorts, where the music and dancers – the flora and fauna of each locale – constantly arouse our attention and curiosity.” – *The Dance Enthusiast*

“Four dancers cycled through solos, duets, and the group, each dancing with a distinct, individual style although still easily moving harmoniously with one another, their movements appearing to flow entirely naturally from their body, with a complete freedom” – *Dance Informa*

[For Wendy Osserman, 40 years is not enough](#) – *Center on the Aisle*

[Wendy Osserman celebrates 40 years of authentic dance](#) – *Dance Informa*

[Wendy Osserman Dance Company to Celebrate 40th Anniversary](#) – *Broadway World*

Vestigal

Presented April 2014 by Theater for the New City, 155 First Avenue, NYC

“An Enigma, Bound by Chaos, Staged by a Veteran Choreographer.

Any opportunity to see the dancer Cori Kresge is welcome. When she was a member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company’s Repertory Understudy Group, her steely, sensuous strength and staggering facility made you question her status as an “understudy.” In works by the Cunningham alumni Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener, she has been just as incisive, if more animal, almost otherworldly, in what seems like her insatiable need to be dancing.

On Friday at Theater for the New City, Ms. Kresge brought those virtues to Vestigal, a new, hourlong piece by the veteran choreographer Wendy Osserman, who has been presenting work in New York since 1976. The premiere marked Ms. Kresge’s 10th anniversary with the Wendy Osserman Dance Company, and evidently it has been a fruitful decade...As a performer, Ms. Osserman, who is (hard to believe) in her early 70s, has her own kind of magnetism. ‘Who wants to be vulnerable, really?’ she asks during a monologue about, of all things, trilobites. Just by saying that, she shows that she’s willing to be.” – *The New York Times*

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More quotes (continued)

Compromised

Presented in 2012 at Hudson Guild Theatre, Chelsea, NYC

“With the premiere of *Compromised* at the Hudson Guild Theatre, Wendy Osserman Dance Company explores the polarization of the political stage through an evening-length work created by Osserman in collaboration with four dancers. Set to musical arrangements of Eric Satie and drummer Victor Lewis, the score also includes interviews with people representing both right- and left-wing viewpoints. The tone of the performance is generally light and breezy; Osserman manages to avoid treating this over-wrought subject with a heavy hand.

As a soft hum of jazzy drums starts to play, dancers Milan Misko and Cori Kresge enter from the back of the small theater, heads bobbing like chickens, eyes alert, scanning the scene. Both dressed in dark suits, Misko takes the lead as Kresge dutifully echoes his movements—the image of an eager campaign aide comes to mind... Osserman herself appears several times throughout the piece, often accompanied by text that pits progressives against conservatives; this ideological split is reflected in the lighting, which alternately illuminates and darkens halves of the stage. As if trying to guide the discussion, Osserman stands center stage, directing traffic with her hands before finally giving up; apparently the effort of making opposing sides listen to each other is just too much. Osserman’s movement follows the light, improvisational vein established early in the piece; it often appears that her body is making its own decisions about what it wants to do—sometimes she tries to control it, and sometimes she just goes with it.” — *Eye on the Arts, NY*

more is more is more or less

Presented May 2009, Wendy Osserman Dance Company featuring Iva Bittová in association with Joyce SoHo, New York

“*more* engages and flows from the beginning. It’s light, humorous and eccentric, with moments of mild cacophony, delighting and providing, as Stein did in her own day, unexpected pleasure.” — *Voice of Dance Forums*

[Gertrude Stein reads in SoHo](#) — *Voice of Dance*

Out of Place

Presented March 2008, Wendy Osserman Dance Company featuring Iva Bittová in association with the Czech Center NY Hudson Guild Theater, 441 West 26th Street, NYC

“Looking statuesque in an enigmatic solo, Osserman may have been a maternal protective presence before she sank feebly downward, only to be revived by Bittová’s violin music.” — *New York Theater Wire*

“provocative precisely because it feels like a new amalgam of some indefinable kind... There is a kind of magic, a sense of being taken to a place you might never visit again.” — *The New York Times*