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June 2011

Kim Epifano Dances to Her 15th Season of Genre-Crossing Performances

By Lori Higa

Sitting in Farley's, local dance legend Kim Epifano stretches out her arms and points to the many people and places she's photographed while traveling through far-flung locales – Tunisia, Nicaragua, and China, to name a few – that grace the walls of the funky café for her upcoming fundraiser. A Hill resident for more than 20 years, Epifano maintains an office at DeHaro and Southern Heights, next door to the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House. This year is special for Epifano; she celebrates the 15th anniversary of her company, Epiphany Productions, with a new home season show that has its roots in her globetrotting work.

One of the evening's pieces – Heelomali – "is Ethiopian for 'she is unique,'" Epifano explained. "It refers to 'Lucy' whose bones were discovered in Ethiopia." Lucy was the name given to the skeleton unearthed in Ethiopia's Afar Rift; evidence of the earliest human ancestors dating back 3.4 million years. "It's interesting how many of the oldest bones they're finding are women's. It's probably because women's bones are stronger due to child bearing, and doing heavy work," she opined. Throughout her travels, Epifano has witnessed working village women heaving gargantuan loads. While in India last year, "I saw women carrying rocks on their heads. It was amazing how resilient women are even when life can be so challenging."

Originally from Boston, Epifano studied dance at the University of Utah. "School just wasn't working for me then," she said. Epifano drove to Guatemala in the late-1970s. "It was the 'Year of the Child,' and I was hired by the Peace Corps to be part of a traveling circus." She performed in small, remote villages all over the country, places where "mules brought in equipment." This early experience is evident in Epifano's life-long interest in cross-culturalism, creating genre-bending, label-defying performances that blend visual art, music, song, aerialist, dance, theater and literary elements.

Epifano's Sonic Dance Theater presents three new works in mid-June in association with ODC Dance Commons. They include Heelomali, developed with critically acclaimed composer and didgeridoo master Stephen Kent and Burmese harp player Su Wai; Alonesome/Twosome, a duet prompted by an air mail drawing sent to Epifano by renowned artist Remy Charlip; and Solo Lo Que Fue, a dance-for-video work shot at Bar Norteño in Mexicali, Mexico.

Epifano's 2009 residency and production in Wondo Genet, Ethiopia, inspired her to develop a partnership with Refugee Transitions, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that helps refugee and immigrant families become self-sufficient. The production coincides with World Refugee Day, and includes many performers Epifano met through the organization who are themselves refugees from war torn areas around the world.

Describing herself as "an abstract artist at my core, being true to self," Epifano's art is about shape-shifting, ritual and healing, "investigating deeper angles and layers of metaphor, to counteract the toxicity we're creating in the modern world with things that are ancient," she said.

On October 15 and 16, Epifano will produce the eighth annual San Francisco Trolley Dances along the K, L and M Muni streetcar lines in the City's southwestern neighborhoods, including the Castro, Outer Mission and West Portal communities. Along with other Bay Area performance ensembles, Epifano will create an original work inspired by the neighborhoods' physical landscapes, cultures, architecture and history.

Epifano has received funding from all of the big name foundations to sustain her work: National Endowment for the Arts, William



Photograph by Nina Sazevich

Epiphany Productions' Kim Epifano

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& Flora Hewlett Foundation, and San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, among others. Still, "it is a challenging time to be a nonprofit and sustain the work," she said.

Epifano's 15th anniversary performances will be held on June 17 and 18 at 8 p.m. and June 19 at 7 p.m. at ODC Theater. Tickets: \$20 general/\$16 students and seniors. ASL interpreter available. For more information: odctheatre.org/buytickets; 863.9834; www.epiphanydance.org

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