

## Dance

# Amy Marshall Dancers

## Going for the Gold in Tenth Year

By FRANCINE L. TREVENS

WE HAVE A habit of making landmarks of decades, so it is no wonder that talented dancer/choreographer Amy Marshall feels, in this tenth year, an extra push should be made to achieve her dreams for the Amy Marshall Dance Company. They are an energetic, dedicated troupe of classically trained dancers who move as smoothly as the music to which they perform.

How long has it been since you went to see a dance company – not a ballet company – and were struck by the beauty of it all? The grace of the dancers with their slim, lithe bodies, the way the costumes aided their movements, the way the lighting caught and enhanced the mood, the way the movements were flowing interpretations of the music to which they were danced? I can tell you after seeing all the frenetic, staccato, acrobatic dancers of most of my dance adventures; this was sheer beauty and delight.

This is the year Ms Marshall hopes to expand the touring venues at which the company performs. It is the year she and husband Chad Levy dedicate their programs to all who have danced with or supported Amy Marshall Dance Company, so they have reprised perennial favorites such as *English Suite* and *Askeew*. This is the year they have guest artists from Paul Taylor Dance Company, also former dancers from their own company, performing with them in celebration of the landmark year. It is also the year Amy Marshall hopes for a grant which allows her to make the company all she dreams it can be.

Born in Japan, Ms Marshall was

go – it's hard to do – hurts, but I have kept many as friends."

In her twenties she was helping directors in the various companies with which she worked. She danced with David Parsons and Paul Taylor 2. Amy candidly says she learned a lot while dancing with those companies. More significantly, she met her husband at Paul Taylor 2.

Her career as a choreographer began when her alma mater, Goucher College, asked her to choreograph a dance camp evening show. The Amy Marshall Dance Company started when they performed in Goucher College's Summer Arts Festival in Baltimore. Next, Chad booked the company into venues in North and South Carolina, New Hampshire and New York. Since, they have performed internationally in Poland, Mexico and China.

"In five years we hope we will be a touring company. Chad could go on tour with them, so could many of the dancers of the company go on tour without me. I do want to return to China with the troupe, though."

One reason for not touring with the company would be actually three reasons: Her twins, Pasha and Devlin, and her new baby, due in a few months.

The Amy Marshall Dance Company has grown and developed many new dances – and dancers – in ten years.

Amy could have stayed with established dance companies. She could have done occasional choreographing. She did not have to go off to form her own company with husband Chad Levy. But, as she says, "I never picked the easy road."



Going for the Gold Dancers: Amy Marshall Dance Company (Photo by Whitney Browne)

ing, so they coach like a team – Judy Kaplan now handles bookings, and Aileen Roehl, a company dancer, designs costumes.

Instead of coming up with deep theories or lofty sounding esthetic insights Amy honestly says, "I choreograph by instinct, I have a pattern in my head. I don't try to second guess myself or dancers. You can get in a rut. I dive in, see what's resulting, edit and bulldoze through."

She gives moves to dancers, takes ideas from what they bring to her work and incorporates what she feels works for them. She describes her work as classicist in inspiration and structure. She prefers "accessible choreography for my dancers, myself and our audience. Because we are a close company, everyone wants to put his/her 2 cents in while I am still working it out, before it is done, making it hard to get the comedy for dancers." This wasn't so much a complaint as an explanation of how they all work together. The comedy was especially strong and delightful in *Going for the Gold*, the piece about Olympic competition.

As a viewer, I was struck by the flowing movements and beauty of all her work. Her dancers dance with exquisite grace and ease, using classic moves creatively.

Although she was a company member of several noted dance troupes, Amy feels her main background is theatre dance: Broadway dances with a story line. She uses story lines in much of her work, as in *Riding the Purple Twilight*.

As we chatted, weeks after I had first seen the company, Amy remarked that true art is pure dance and added "dancers in space in motion is art." Certainly true when she choreographs them.

Amy choreographed for herself a piece called *A Gift*, about a pregnant woman contemplating and glorying in her impending motherhood. Very obviously pregnant, Amy danced the solo piece the night we were there and I found it a primal paean to motherhood.

Amy has two exquisite children, twins, who were charmingly dressed audience members. Seeing them in the lobby after the performance,

the friend with me that evening, remarked, "She makes beautiful children as well as beautiful dances." I said I would steal the line – and so I have.

During our interview, Amy said, "Motherhood is an extension of my company – dealing with different personalities, being careful how you deal with them, especially if you want them to do what you want. Chad is a master in executive coaching, so we coach like a team."

As to her work, she stated, "If you are given a gift, trust it, go for it! Trust yourself to do it, and do it. It somehow works out."

For example, *Going for the Gold*, the rousing and riotous final piece on the night I saw them, needed 14 dancers. They didn't have them when she started work on it, but they were there in the end.

When he was booking the company, Chad often found resistance to a female choreographer, frequently hearing "we have male choreographers, their work is stronger."

While choreographing is natural to her, writing grants is not. "I can't fluff myself up," she explained. But she can extol her company: "We are a small company but we have expectations as if we are a big corporation. We expect dancers to show up on time, know their moves, etc." How do you convey that in a grant proposal? Also, many grants are established to assist certain minorities. "We are married, with children, white, and I'm a female choreographer. No grants are specified for that." Yet all small companies rely on grants to help them move to the next strata in the dance world.

What Amy brings to dance is the pure incarnation of the music through beautifully trained bodies in lyrical moves that create an otherworldly beauty. Grant givers need only see her work to realize this is a rare and remarkable talent in today's technocentric world.

Keep an eye out for the Amy Marshall Dance Company and see their elegance, grace and humor for yourself.



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Riding the Purple Twilight Dancers left to right: Alexandra Karigan and Chad Levy (Photo by Whitney Browne)

raised in Bronx schools, and notes, "I was always dancing. At 10 I notated my choreography with titles and names for moves. I did shows for cousins, family." She now teaches at Hofstra where she mentors young dancers. "I like teaching, coaching, choreographing students." She has been doing it now one day a week for 6 years. Mentoring is a special passion of hers. The hard part is seeing the dancers move on, from classes or her company. "I had to learn to let them

When they were founding their company, Chad wanted it to be called the Amy Marshall Dancers rather than a combination of their names, because he felt female choreographers got little attention or respect and hoped Amy could make the breakthrough for herself and other talented women choreographers. As Executive Director, he handles all the background business work, as well as dancing with the company. She said Chad is a master in executive coach-