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So Who's in Charge? Not the Choreographer

By SUSAN REITER

ONE could say that Peter Boal is living out many dancers' fantasy when he performs at the Joyce Theater this week. Rather than being the dancer who is asked by a choreographer to perform in a piece, he was the one doing the asking, selecting three choreographers to create new solo works for him.

"Peter Boal Solos" is one of two programs among the seven in this year's Altogether Different series that break the usual mold. In the other, "Vocalscapes: A Gathering," the musician and composer Philip Hamilton has invited collaborators from widely contrasting arenas of the dance world to create pieces to his compositions, which will be performed live by his seven-member ensemble.

For both men, the series offers a rare opportunity to make artistic choices and, at the same time, shoulder the full responsibility for shaping a program.

As a principal dancer with New York City Ballet — he celebrates his 20th anniversary this year — Mr. Boal, 37, knows well how a major ballet troupe operates. "The only way a large company can work is that the artistic director, with some consultants, selects the choreographers who are invited in," he said during a recent rehearsal at the School of American Ballet in Lincoln Center, where he teaches 12 classes a week. "They watch performances and classes and then choose their dancers."

But Mr. Boal said he wanted to reverse the process. "The embryo of the idea was to assemble several dancers and choreographers, and have it be a collaboration where the dancers have input," he said. "Everyone would choose one another, but I wanted it to

Susan Reiter's most recent article for Arts & Leisure was about John Kelly and his latest work, "The Paradise Project."

Altogether Different

Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea. Through Jan. 19.

come from the dancers first."

When he decided to focus on solos, he turned to two choreographers, Molissa Fenley and Wendy Perron — he had previously danced in their work — as well as his fellow City Ballet principal, Albert Evans, whose debut ballet for the company, "Haiku," had been well received last spring.

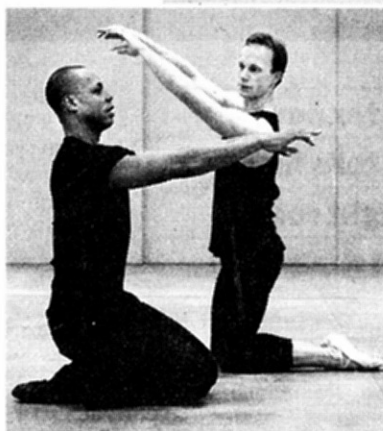
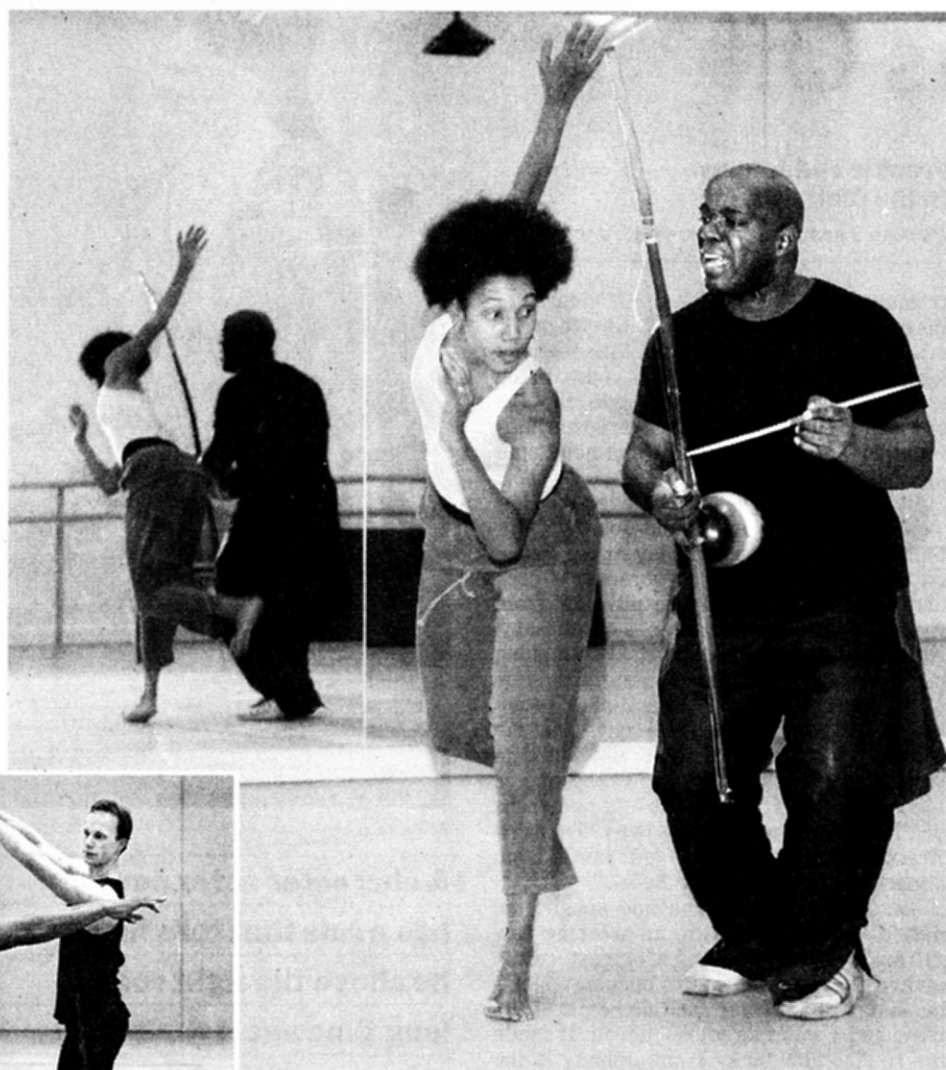
"I knew these three personalities would sit down together and say, 'We're part of a whole,'" he said. "It wasn't the least bit competitive."

Mr. Boal has frequently explored choreography outside the City Ballet repertory. In addition to working with Ms. Fenley and Ms. Perron (who occasionally writes about dance for The New York Times), he has also performed solos created for him by Leigh Witchel and Diane Coburn Bruning.

"Vocalscapes" is a new incarnation of the collaborative program that Mr. Hamilton, 42, presented earlier at Dance Theater Workshop and Dancspace. A vocalist and percussionist as well as a composer, he became fascinated with dance while accompanying classes in Boston in the 1980's. He has composed music and performed for many choreographers, including Ronald K. Brown and Ann Reinking.

"The Joyce left it up to me," he said recently at the studios at the Duke on 42nd Street, where he had just rehearsed with Andrea E. Woods, one of his collaborators. "They basically said, 'Do your thing.'"

"Over the years I'd been working with a



Above, Joyce Dopkeen/The New York Times; inset, Andrea Mohin/The New York Times
The choreographer Andrea E. Woods and the composer Philip Hamilton; inset, the choreographer Albert Evans, far left, and Peter Boal of New York City Ballet.

lot of different choreographers, anything from jazz to hip-hop to African to modern to ballet," he added. "My ballet friends don't know my hip-hop friends; the hip-hop dancers don't know the downtown dancers. I wanted to show the beauty of all the different styles of movement."

His collaborators include the modern-dance choreographer Kevin Wynn; Michele

Assaf, who works in a Broadway style; Stephen Mills, the artistic director of Ballet Austin; Telly Fowler, a former member of Mr. Brown's company, as well as Ms. Woods, who performed with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.

Mr. Boal encouraged his choreographers to watch rehearsals of one another's work and to offer suggestions. For Mr. Evans,

**A dancer and a composer
turn the tables in
collaborative works at
the Joyce Theater.**

who is used to choreographing with his dancers behind closed doors, the process took some getting used to, but he came to value the interaction. "Wendy came in and offered input as far as the costume and colors that she thought might work," said Mr. Evans, who created "One Body" to music by John Kennedy. "It's always interesting to see how other choreographers work, where their creativity comes from."

After a rehearsal of her "Waiting for Rain," a 25-minute solo that is set to a haunting score by Robert Ashley, Ms. Fenley discussed how she created all the movement alone — her customary practice — and then spent many hours in the studio, leading Mr. Boal through the dance until it became his own. Mr. Boal jokingly referred to her as his "guide dog."

Mr. Boal has danced two other Fenley solos and one duet since 1997, including "State of Darkness," her monumental solo set to the complete "Rite of Spring," but the new work is the first she has created specifically for him.

"He's got a wonderful way of translating what I make," she said of Mr. Boal. "He takes what he already knows and tried to do as much as he can with what you give him. It's a very pure translation."

Speaking a few days later, after a week-end spent performing in four "Nutcrackers" in Maryland, Mr. Boal said: "The roles I've loved at City Ballet are those where you're onstage for so much time that you can lose yourself in the role: 'Apollo,' 'Prodigal Son,' 'Opus 19.' They're like rich, endless solos. There's interaction with other people, but you don't have the downtime. I like the type of performance where it's you on the stage for the entire body of work. That's where the solos are the same thing."

"I love working with choreographers," he added. "It's the best part of the career. When one of them calls you on the phone, it's nice to take the chance and do it." What must be even nicer is that this time Mr. Boal was the one who made the calls. □