

Magazine

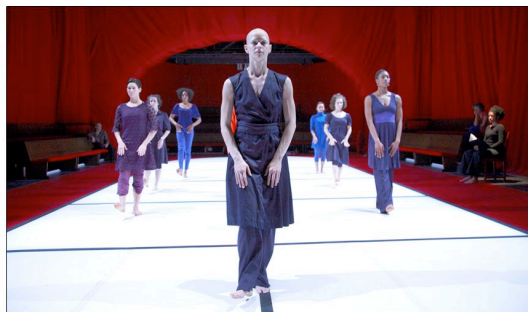
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PAUL B. GOODE

The Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane Company, with Leah Cox in front. Jones has built a program around three disturbing events.

Suicide and murder as the stuff of dance

By Ellen Dunkel
FOR THE INQUIRER

Choreographer Bill T. Jones is known for creating dances that make political statements — on patriotism, civil unrest, religious conflict. But in his latest evening-length work, *Chapel/Chapter*, he points out that there's also much that is beyond our control.

"We've been led to believe that we make meaning in the world," he says, but "sometimes the world imposes meanings on things."

See **DANCE** on D4

Dance

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company

7:30 tonight and tomorrow, Zellerbach Theatre, Annenberg Center. Tickets \$32-\$46. www.pennpresents.org or 215-898-3900.

Suicide, murder inspire an evening of dance

DANCE from D1

Charles Scott, a dancer in Jones' company, agrees. When Scott was a 12-year-old at summer camp, he was an unwitting witness to a friend's suicide.

It was on a camping trip that "a friend of mine asked me to accompany him to the top of a waterfall," the dancer, now 31, said in a phone interview. "We were playing around, sitting there, and the next thing I knew, he had basically jumped over the waterfall."

Scott's story is one of three

disturbing tales Jones has incorporated into *Chapel/Chapter*, which his Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company is bringing to the Zellerbach Theatre today and tomorrow. The piece addresses the news media, the court system and prisons through dance, live music, spoken and written text, a video by associate artistic director Janet Wong, and scenery by sculptor and set designer Bjorn Amelan.

The other two stories are very different from Scott's personal account — both of them were, yes, ripped from

the headlines, about a man who killed a family of four, and another who slew his own daughter.

Jones' idea for this *Chapel/Chapter* arose from the trial of Sept. 11 terrorist Zacarias Moussaoui. "That trial was so gripping and curious in its outcome, partly with the judge quoting T.S. Eliot," he recalled in a phone interview.

(U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema told Moussaoui, as she sentenced him to life in a super-maximum security facility, "You came here to be a

martyr in a great big bang of glory, but, to paraphrase the poet T.S. Eliot, instead you will die with a whimper.")

Jones found it fascinating that "a modernist poem should find a place in a very public early-21st-century trial dealing with terrorism. It pushed a lot of buttons I had about social consciousness."

Jones compares a theater audience to a courtroom.

"*Chapel/Chapter* walks through a track that I've been very interested in since the days of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," he says, referring to *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land*, a piece he choreographed in 1990. "Truth as community bearing witness — not necessarily passing judgment, but instantly defined by what it is grappling with. There's something potent about performing," he says. "It forces us into an instant community."

He links the words *community* and *communion* to make the theater a sacred space — a chapel.

Jones is on top of the dance world right now, as both dancer and choreographer. He performed a solo at the Louvre in Paris in November and won a 2007 Tony Award for choreographing last year's best-musical winner, *Spring Awakening*. He is working on the choreography and direction of another Broadway show, this one focusing on the music of Afrobeat founder Fela Kuti. He has received a MacArthur "genius" award (1994), as well as nearly every major award honoring American choreographers.

Chapel/Chapter was originally a site-specific work performed in a small theater. Jones planned it to be inti-

mate, for a limited audience gathered around the scene of an intense encounter. (At the Zellerbach, a small portion of the audience will be on stage, the rest in traditional seating.)

Scott's story emerged after Jones asked a few dancers to scan their lives for personal experiences that they found it difficult to talk about. Scott wrote his reflection in an e-mail to Jones, but couldn't bring himself to hit "send" for several weeks.

"It was very confessional for me, because I hadn't talked to anyone, ever, including at the time it was happening," he says. "There was an investigation. ... I was interviewed, but I was really able to keep my mouth shut. There was also this not understanding what was happening or why I was involved." He still has not talked to his parents about the incident, he says, although he plans to in the next few months, before they see the show.

He has found *Chapel/Chapter* therapeutic. "It's been a really good experience with me to just kind of work through this whole thing. Bill has been so great about it."

But bringing his story to the surface after nearly two decades was not easy. After Scott finally found the courage to send the e-mail, Jones acknowledged receiving it, but didn't say another word about it for three months.

Then one day at rehearsal, he asked Scott, completely without warning, "Can you stand in the middle while everyone else is dancing — and tell your story?"

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