

# The Star-Ledger

STATE EDITION

NJ.COM

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2010



## Rewarding loyalty

Nicolette Depass and Norwood Pennewell in Garth Fagan's "Woza"

### NEW YORK CELEBRATES COMPANY'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

By Robert Johnson  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

**N**EW YORK— Garth Fagan is throwing a party to celebrate the 40th anniversary of his company, Garth Fagan Dance. A lively fete concludes this season's premiere, a dance called "Thanks Forty." And Fagan, now ensconced in the top rank of America's most distinguished, contemporary choreographers, wishes to express his gratitude to all the people who have helped him over the years — especially his dancers.

Recalling the dedication of performers whose bodies are their only instruments and support, Fagan says, "If you're a musician and you have a piano concerto to play, even if you have the flu the piano is going to be there to help you out. When you're a dancer, everything is gone; everything is sick and cloudy."

Fagan's loyal dancers have always been there for him, regardless of the occasional bout with flu or injury, and "Thanks Forty" draws special attention to a trio of veterans. Nicolette Depass, Steve Humphrey and Norwood ("P.J.") Pennewell get to whoop it up in the finale. Fagan does not let them off easily, however.

Typically, this ending includes daredevil bits where the dancers run cross-legged, while their elbows chisel a path through space. Balance is a recurrent theme in Fagan's plotless works and here, even in a lighthearted moment, he makes his cast fight for it. At other moments, the dancers must concentrate to maintain an internal rhythm. "Thanks Forty" does not simply congratulate them, it shows these artists at

their determined best.

The piece begins with a solo highlighting Depass' lightness and the liquid undulations in her hips and shoulders. It has a stalwart men's section, and a more relaxed and supportive women's ensemble. The music is eclectic, passing from a Shostakovich cello concerto to Angolan drumbeats by Bonga Kuenda and onward to Gerald Albright's jazz saxophones.

Adding a personal touch, Fagan also includes the warbling of his pet parakeet, Rasta.

"I could have ended it four days ago, with a nice and easy bang-up," Fagan says. "But that's not what I want. I want a complex, rhythmic ending that has oodles of surprises for the audience."

In addition to the premiere of "Thanks," this anniversary season will feature Pennewell's choreographic debut with a

tautly structured dance called "Hylozoic." Of major interest, too, will be the revival of Fagan's "Passion Distanced," from 1987.

This dramatically lit piece expresses the journey of the artist, who must put aside distractions and overcome life's traumas in order to pursue his vision. Pennewell, who won a Bessie award following his performance in this dance more than 20 years ago, returns in his original role; while company apprentice John Mercado and Depass rest uneasily beside what Fagan calls "the pool of knowledge."

"You've got to distance your passions to get the important things accomplished," Fagan says. "It's the only way you can build a dance company."

Robert Johnson: [rjohnson@starledger.com](mailto:rjohnson@starledger.com)

#### Garth Fagan Dance

**Where:** *The Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Ave. at 19th Street*

**When:** *Through Nov. 14, Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday at 7:30 p.m., Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., with matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m.*

**How much:** *Tickets are \$19-\$59. Call (212) 242-0800 or visit [joyce.org](http://joyce.org)*