

Passionate Heart: the dance comes to Alton Mill Arts Centre

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Michele Green and Suzette Sherman are dancing their Passionate Heart at the Alton Mills Arts Centre on Saturday, March 28.

"Alton Mill will be our 26th presentation," said Michele Green, "We wanted to bring Passionate Heart to the Mill. So, we talked to Jeremy [Grant, co-owner with his brother, Jordan] about it and when he and Jordan understood what it is, they wanted to come in on it with us. We walked around the different studios that are spaces for performance and decided that the Pond Gallery is best for this. It is such a beautiful space. And big enough.

"We're really excited about doing this at the Mill."

Ms. Green and Ms. Sherman have been dancing their Passionate Heart for three years now. "We're really chugging along," Ms. Green remarked. "On Sunday, March 8, we danced for International Women's Day in Guelph. It was already sold out two weeks ahead. There were five speakers and we donated the proceeds to Women in Crisis in Guelph."

To demonstrate how they are focussed with this work, she told us, "We have collaborated in a writer's workshop, where people wrote what they thought or felt after the dances. We did a musicians' workshop and invited them to play or write the music they felt.

"The Women's Day was our biggest show so far.

"We're going to Toronto to do a closed presentation there on May 31 and we'll be doing the Guelph Dance Festival in May this year. That will be full circle for us - that's where Suzette and I danced together in 2017 for the first time. She had persuaded me to come back to dance so that we could dance together. We prepared for a year for the festival. We created a duet about friendship. Following that, we got the idea to do Passionate Heart together."

They did this in collaboration with Dancetheatre David Earle in Guelph. Mr. Earle has choreographed much of the dances they perform in the Passionate Heart.

As to how she is doing this far along the road, Ms. Green told us, "I'm great - I'm really enjoying this trip - really glad to be dancing again with Suzette and David Earle and the responses from this has been incredible. The conversation is great and that we are so close to the audience and we can see them as they can see us is really different."

Creativity encourages more ideas: "We're getting great ideas, though some of them don't work out. We're meeting lots of people; the train is really going." Admitting, "We don't know how much longer we'll be able to do this.

"It makes us realize it could be over at any time," she reflected. "We have talked about getting some of the younger dancers in the studio and teaching them the dances. We have dancers say they would love to do this but there isn't any money. And dancers need to be paid to perform..

"We have three new numbers we're bringing to the Guelph Dance Festival."

She said, "We do dance about negative emotions. Doing the whole show is a journey for us: the first dance is happy and then we go into darker elements. My solo is called the Prisoner and then our next duet is Within the Walls. At the end, we go into the friendship - that's about our friendship. We've done it over 100 times in rehearsal and performance. Every time, we feel that we've gone through this journey together.

"We'd love to make a video but dancing is so hard to video. To have a good video for dancers, you need different angles, good

lighting.?

Talking about the intention of their dance, Ms. Green made the comment, 'We're not entertainers, we're artists. Artists are people who are trying to get the audience to feel to experience something else. It's like seeing a beautiful painting. Entertainment for the most part makes you feel better.

'We hope we are causing the audience to feel what we're feeling and that they go away feeling that they've had an experience. Some people have seen us three times and they tell us, 'Each time we see something different' because they are at a different time in their lives, like that beautiful painting that you go back to over and over again. It appeals to you on a different level every time.

'We really believe that doing *Passionate Heart* for small groups is what we want to do. We don't want to go into theatres and do this for hundreds of people. Suzette has danced around the world before thousands of strangers. We don't want to do that. We want to share with small audiences and we love doing groups because everyone comes in with their friends.'

After the show, 'There is always a discussion after the dance. It can be very short, other times longer. Sometimes, it's too soon after the dancing and they just want to go home and think about it.

'Often, when the discussion is over and we're packing up, people will come over and say some amazing things 'it's great and it just kind of flows. It's the total opposite to the dance scenario, really different.'

The conversation turned to practicalities: 'We feel that we probably could get money. We're established but then we worry that by getting a grant, we'd be pigeon-holed 'we are part of the Guelph Arts Council now.

'Still, ticket sales have kept us afloat, especially to pay our rent for studio space for rehearsal. [In the program] There are six dances: four duets and two solos. They are the same as the original choreography so far. We have three new dances to replace what we're doing. There are new pieces for the two solos and one of the duets.

'It's good for us to do new things for the sake of rehearsal and keeping fresh,' explained Ms. Green. 'We've tried others but we felt they didn't tell a story. I've choreographed my solo and Suzette has done hers but David did the duet.

'We'll be launching them at the Guelph Dance Festival, May 31. It'll be good, bringing something new to the festival.'

With so much dancing the same dances, can it become stale, they have wondered. However, Michele Green put it this way: 'You have to let it rest for a while. After the Christmas break, we came back to it and it was so interesting, so meaningful again.

We use music from the 1300's 'a composer, Hildegard van Bingen; the Flower Duet from *Lakmé* for our opening duet. Then, from Giovanni Pergolesi, a *Stabat Mater* [sorrowing mother]; unknown music from the late 1300's for my solo. All the music has stories. For our program, we do the first duet; Suzette speaks a few words and then we dance straight through.'

She explained it this way: 'People hear everything in words but to see something you feel in dance. We feel what the audience is feeling. We're very vulnerable and go through that. The next morning after a show I feel it's totally impossible.'

Like looking in a mirror, she conceded, 'I don't if I can take this journey; it's very demanding but at the end, we're rewarded so strongly. You go to a different place when you're performing.'

What she wants, what they both want: 'We hope to connect with people and inspire them to use their minds and use their emotions. One woman said she's never felt that much emotion by anything she's seen.'

Said Michele Green, 'They are universal stories.'

Passionate Heart will be performed Saturday March 28 at 2:00 p.m. at the Alton Mill Arts Centre. Tickets and information are at www.altonmill.ca or at the door.