



Photo by Dean Wallraff

By Luke Netzley
Pasadena Weekly Deputy Editor
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As part of its new Science of Dance Weekend, Discovery Cube Los Angeles will welcome Benita Bike's DanceArt to the stage, presenting a celebration of contemporary dance that is as touching as it is energetic.

Known for its elegant performance and dramatic use of space and gesture, the quartet will present a selection of new and classic dances at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 26. The show will not only include a brand-new work-in progress performance but will also feature fan favorites such as "Benches," an immersive park scene that imagines the lives of people passing by; "On Beat 3," a trio of driving percussive rhythms and ballistic, off-balance movements; and "Duet from 'Entrelazadas,'" a short story of two women in a high energy storm set to the music of Rodrigo.

DanceArt founder Benita Bike first entered into the world of dance at the age of 3 when her mother decided that she needed to lighten her step. Bike performed in dance shows throughout her childhood but found that she hated dancing on a stage in front of a crowd.

Her disdain for public performance began to ease, however, after she began learning under her high school teacher Virginia Robinson, who would assign composition problems in dance class and introduced Bike to the world of choreography. Bike fell so in love with the work that her teacher coordinated with the school to allow her to skip sports and instead spend two hours at the end of school dedicated to dance choreography.

“The way I looked at the world when I was young was that the world is your oyster,” Bike said. “You can do anything. It’s just a matter of figuring out the system, getting the key to the door, and having that sense of energy.”

Bike went on to start her choreography career in Boston, where she became chair of the Boston Dance Alliance and founded her own dance studio before moving to Los Angeles at the age of 39.

In the studio, Bike’s process can be described as abstract choreography. While there are choreographers who will write down a plan and execute every detail, Bike thrives off collaboration and the freedom to make a mistake.

“I feel like the dance gives birth to itself,” Bike explained. “What I am is the midwife, the one who communicates with the dancers, but the dance wants to become what it wants to become. And I feel like my job is to help it get there.”

By playing with elements of art dance and reacting to accidents that occur during a piece’s creation, Bike’s choreography truly takes on a life of its own as she and her team experiment with their craft.

At the core of Bike’s mission is the desire to bring more exposure to the world of art dance through her performances by giving audiences a frame of reference and exposing them to a bounty of knowledge about the art form, knowledge that can be transferred to other forms of art as well.

“For some people it comes naturally, but others just need the door open for them,” Bike said. “And I’m hoping that the next time they get an invitation to go to a museum, they’ll say, ‘Well, I know how to look at dance, so maybe I know how to look at paintings or sculptures.’ Not to feel put off by art, but to realize each of these is somebody’s expression of what they’re experiencing in life.”

Like many businesses during the last two years, the outbreak of COVID-19 brought immense hardship to Bike’s studio. After her 30th anniversary show last June, all five of the dancers that Bike had been working with for the past 5 to 10 years left as the pandemic worsened.

“I spent a couple of months really going into my heart and trying to figure out what I should do,” Bike said. “And I finally decided that I’m not at a place where I want to give up what I do yet. I still feel I have something to offer.”

Bike set up auditions and accepted four new dancers: Skye Schmidt, a professional dance photographer and UC Irvine graduate with an extensive background in ballet; Samantha Rogers, a Pilates studio manager and graduate from Chapman University; Nola Gibson, a physical therapy specialist and UC Irvine graduate; and Lydia McDonald, a dancer and dance teacher.

“We’re starting from scratch, building up a repertory,” Bike described. “I’ve gotten a real shot in the arm with this new company. They’re young, enthusiastic, extremely skilled and cohesive. They like each other and they like what they’re doing with me, so I’m excited because they’re excited.”

With a new team of talented dancers and a grant from the city of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Bike is looking forward to bringing DanceArt back to the stage on Feb. 26 at Discovery Cube Los Angeles.

Tickets to the performance are required, but they are free for the first 50 entrants to the show and may be obtained by pre-registering through benita@danceart.org with a name and number of guests. After the first 50 tickets are taken, one-day admission tickets to the Discovery Cube Science of Dance Weekend can be purchased for \$13.95 for kids 14 years of age and younger and \$15.95 for adults.

Benita Bike’s DanceArt

WHEN: 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 26

WHERE: Discovery Cube Los Angeles, 11800 Foothill Boulevard, Sylmar

COST: Free for the first 50 entrants. One day admission for the Science of Dance Weekend is \$13.95 for kids 14 years of age and younger, \$15.95 for adults. Membership levels which include unlimited admission for an entire year start at \$79.

INFO: discoverycube.org/tickets-faq