

Goose Route Remembers

Sometimes it's important to stop what you're doing and ponder life's really important questions, such as, "Is that a cummerbund on that maple tree?" Or, "Is that canoe dancing the foxtrot on the boat ramp?" If you even have to ask, or if you find yourself wondering whether it's the effect of the West Virginia home-distilled peach brandy or if, indeed, there are dancers in the pasture next door, you haven't been following the growth of Goose Route Arts Collaborative. Begun in the 1990s as a loose-knit band of dancers, since 2001, GRAC has produced an annual summer dance festival and a year-round intriguing mix of multi-genre performances.

Known best for their annual summer dance festival, GRAC has gathered a dedicated following for its Art Farm Performance Café and site-specific dance. The Art Farm, produced by executive director Kitty Clark, along with partner musician-composer Cam Millar, is an occasional offering featuring local and regional artists in a coffee house venue. The evenings combine diverse styles and art forms, including poetry, dance, music, experimental film, and visual art.

Another Goose Route signature is site-specific dance—those people in pastures. These began in 2000, when Clark and collaborator Sharon Mansur performed *Down by the Riverside*, an improvisational dance performance with professional dancers, community dancers, kids, adults, and local musicians. This celebration of the river featured a dancing canoe, French horn, and a trombone calling across the river, and festive potluck picnics to finish.

The heart of Goose Route's work has been dance. A New York-born choreographer and dancer who took up full-time residence in Jefferson County in 1999, Clark's first forays into founding a performance troop here focused on creating



a resident dance ensemble that performed at the 1997 Contemporary American Theater Festival. That experience led to the creation of the Goose Route Dance Festival, which marked its seventh season in 2007. The '07 festival included two weeks of concerts, master classes for adults, classes for kids, free family shows, lectures, dance on film, outreach events, and a teacher training program.

"For the first season of the dance festival, I recruited every dancer through my network of colleagues in New York and Washington, D.C.," said Clark. "Last year we received nearly 40 proposals from choreographers who want to have their work presented at the Goose Route festival."

The work of the nonprofit group—to produce performance events and to teach dancers of all ages and abilities—has led to a new Christmas holiday tradition in Shepherdstown. Beginning in 2003, Goose Route began producing the Goose Route Holiday Show to give GRAC students opportunities to perform in a community-oriented celebration. At these shows, professionals and amateurs sing holiday songs, perform solstice dances, tell Santa Claus stories, and play traditional instruments.

Now the group has joined another collaborative effort: the

American Conservation Film Festival and Potomac Valley Audubon Society's Potomac Arts Festival. Goose Route's Remember, an outdoor art and performance event will feature a movable feast of dance, live and recorded music, and sculpture—cue the cummerbunds!

"What makes this event most exciting," said Clark, "is that all of it—music, dance, sculpture—was created specifically for the National Conservation Training Center grounds." The performance begins at a pond and processes, with audience in tow, to other locations, including the well known footbridge on campus.

"Working with visual artist Colleen Tracey and composer Cam Millar on this project has been great," said Clark. "Each of us brings a different perspective to the site, which really makes for a rich artistic experience," Clark says.

Along with dancers Eva Olsson, Tosha Tillman, Ray Shaw and musicians Don Oehser, Laura First, Richard Hopkins, and Gay Henderson, Tracey, Millar, and Clark have woven together dance, music, and visual art to provide opportunities for audiences to ruminate on the residue of human history and to reconnect with the fragile beauty of the natural environment. •



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