Student dancers connect to four — make that five — elements

By Anne Brice, Berkeley News | APRIL 20, 2017

With Earth Day approaching, student dancers will take the stage to explore how humans interact with each other and the natural world in Berkeley Dance Project 2017, the last show of the season by the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies.

Inspired by the theme “digging deep,” the performance features original works by choreographers Krista DeNio and department lecturer and alumnus James Graham, as well as by students José Nuño and Angie Corley, who strive in different ways to address our complex human, and extra-human, relationships.

In “Meta Morphic,” Graham worked with students to represent the four elements — earth, air, water and fire — as well as an additional element that he came up with, “marrow,” which he defines as the essence of heart and humanity.

“What I have come to know through this piece is that we are the earth, the water, the soil, the rock, the oxygen, the charcoal,” says Graham. “There is no separation between us humans and the natural world. It can be a radical act to claim this place in the natural world... It can help us to care about environmental causes inside and outside the borders of our skin.”

To make the piece come alive, Graham encouraged dancers to improvise, something that first-year student dancer Stella Ji says makes the movement in the piece more raw and natural. “We have to connect to the various elements,” she says. “I represent earth, so I learned to be more grounded in my movements. Improvisation in this piece reflects how the natural world is ever-changing.”
“Basural” by TDPS student José Nuño (Photo by Andrew Weeks)

Also featured is a new work by guest choreographer DeNio, “Network,” an ensemble dance piece that that draws on stories of formerly incarcerated people to explore the concept of confinement. Student choreographers Nuño and Corley will also stage their pieces, “Basural” and “BLahh!”

Berkeley Dance Project 2017 opens Thursday, April 20, and continues through Saturday, April 29, at the Zellerbach Playhouse on campus. Tickets are $13-$20 and can be purchased online or at the door. The show runs 75 minutes with no intermission.

To learn more about Berkeley Dance Project 2017, visit the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies website.
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