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# Ann Arbor Dance Works harnesses the wind in new work



Kirk Donaldson Photography. Dancer: Patty Solorzano. Ann Arbor Dance Works 2014: Into the Wind

(Courtesy photo)

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 on June 06, 2014 at 5:20 AM, updated June 06, 2014 at 5:21 AM

When air moves through space, it's wind. When bodies move through space, it's dance.

The two fuse in new choreography from Jessica Fogel, artistic director of Ann Arbor Dance Works, the resident professional dance company of the University of Michigan Department of Dance.

"Into the Wind," created in collaboration with a cyclone of U-M faculty and students, plus faculty from Grand Valley State University and the executive director of Muskegon's Michigan Alternative & Renewable Energy Center (MAREC), blows into Ann Arbor for two preview performances June 11 and 12, at the dance department's Petty Pease Studio Theater.

In August, the dance, inspired by the potential of harnessing the wind as a renewable energy source, pushes west, to Muskegon. There, it receives a performance at a site delimited on one side by our energy past (a coal-fired power plant) and on the other by possible futures (MAREC). It's perfectly mated to the questions that the dance poses.

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**PREVIEW**

**Into the Wind**

- Who: Ann Arbor Dance Works
- What: “Into the Wind,” a new dance inspired by the potential of harnessing the wind as a renewable energy source.
- Where: Betty Pease Studio Theater, 1310 N. University Court, in the U-M Dance Building on the U-M Central Campus (adjacent to CCRB).
- When: Wednesday and Thursday (June 11-12), 7:30 p.m.
- How Much: \$5, general admission. Seating is limited and advance purchase is recommended, although tickets may be available at the door. Through the Michigan Union Ticket Office, 530 S. State St., (734) 763-8587, or online at mutotix.com.

For more information, visit [annarbordanceworks.com](http://annarbordanceworks.com).

rehearsals,” writes dancer Patty Solorzano on the blog devoted to the project, “it’s been interesting to explore various ideas involving wind within the body. What is wind? How is wind created? How can we create wind (breath) with our bodies? How can we figuratively become wind and thereby understand it? Perhaps by understanding the relationship between humans and our ability to harness our breath as a source of movement we can understand the relationship between communities and the ability to harness wind as a source of energy.”

That’s an ambitious goal, but one the creators and dancers – six students and faculty member Robin Wilson, for whom Fogel is creating a solo – are taking seriously.

But then again, Ann Arbor Dance Works has lots of experience making engaging site-specific dances that heighten audiences’ sensitivity to landscapes and issues urban and pastoral.

In this case, the dancers have visited the Muskegon site, and they, and creator/director Fogel, have sought input on wind energy from folks like Sara Adlerstein, a visual artist and research scientist at the U-M School of Natural Resources and Environment; Sarah Mills, a doctoral candidate in the U-M Urban and Regional Planning Program; MAREC Executive Director T. Arnold Boezaart; and Erik Nordman, a professor in Natural



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Resources Management at Grand Valley State University. (A second choreographer, U-M alumnus Shawn Bible, who now teaches at Grand Valley, will also choreograph for the Muskegon performance with dancers from GVSU.)

“Into the Wind,” says Fogel, acknowledges the fraught nature of the subject – not everyone, or every community, or every environmentalist, loves a wind turbine, in wind farms or offshore. If a community like Muskegon sees offshore wind as a potential source of community renewal, nearby resort communities, more focused on tourism, see downsides where Muskegon sees cause for optimism.

“It’s a community with a lot of grit and resilience,” Fogel said.

Asked if “Into the Wind” takes a stance, Fogel categorizes herself and her collaborators as “pro-wind.”

But, she added, “we also understand that there have been many problematic issues with the siting of wind farms. We’re trying to avoid being didactic, and to approach the ideas in a qualitative, poetic way. I’ve been focused on capturing the spirit of the site -- its legacy as a former industrial site and its visions for a future fueled at least in part by alternative energy.

So if the dance sets out to teach, it must work as art, not treatise.

That’s where taking wind as movement metaphor comes in. That’s where poet Keith Taylor comes in, contributing a poem, “Circle in the Wind,” that’s part of the soundscore. That’s where snippets of interviews with 80-something former workers at Continental Motors come in, and where composer Robert Alexander comes in, sonifying wind data from a buoy out on Lake Michigan, turning air currents into music. Composer Dave Biedenbender works magic with percussion and flute and recorded sounds; freelance costume designer Patty Branam lofts the work with her designs.

And the audience will get a chance, after seeing “Into the Wind,” to hear from collaborators, including Fogel, and to ask questions about how breath becomes movement that propels not just bodies but dialog about important issues.

*Susan Isaacs Nisbett is a freelance entertainment writer for The Ann Arbor News.*

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