

The New York Times

A Dance About the Things We Carry (Sorrow and Rage)



Kimberly Bartosik on becoming a choreographer: "There's something in *this* body that these really fantastic male artists haven't gotten to. So what is that? Only I can access it."
Credit Lauren Lancaster for The New York Times

By Siobhan Burke

Oct. 30, 2018

Like some of the best New York stories, it started with a chance encounter on a subway platform. The longtime dancer Kimberly Bartosik was waiting for a train when a colleague, the choreographer and curator Dean Moss, approached her with an unexpected question: Would she be interested in making a dance?

That was about 20 years ago, and Ms. Bartosik has since choreographed more than a dozen works. She related that anecdote over coffee recently near the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where her latest evening-length piece, "I hunger for you," will be presented, beginning on Wednesday, as part of the Next Wave Festival.

Though she had performed with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for nine years, and with Wally Cardona for several more, she hadn't seriously considered creating her own work until Mr. Moss proposed it.

“Something in me was like, ‘I think you should see what this is,’” she said, “and it opened up this whole Pandora’s box.”

Since that tentative start, Ms. Bartosik, 52, has thrown herself into the precarious life of a freelance dance maker. One of just a few female choreographers to come out of Cunningham’s company, she spent years distancing herself from his influence. Still, in works of feverish beauty and mystery, she seems to share his proclivity for stretching dancers (herself included) to imaginative physical extremes.



From left, Joanna Kotze, Lindsay Jones and Dylan Crossman rehearsing Ms. Bartosik’s “I hunger for you,” at Lumberyard in Catskill, N.Y.

Credit Lauren Lancaster for The New York Times

Ms. Bartosik spent her formative years in upstate New York and North Carolina, one of five siblings raised by evangelical parents. The core of “I hunger for you,” she said, is a reflection on faith — of all kinds, not just religious — and its power to transform the body. At a recent rehearsal, five courageous members of her company, daela, appeared to surrender themselves to ecstatic, sometimes erotic states, backed by Sivan Jacobovitz’s roiling soundscape.

“There’s a wildness that has grown in her work — a desire for wildness and violence in the body,” said the dancer and choreographer Joanna Kotze, who has worked with Ms. Bartosik since 2009.

That artistic shift has paralleled new opportunities. The Next Wave Festival invitation, Ms. Bartosik said, brought levels of funding and creative support she had never before received, including a residency at Lumberyard in Catskill, N.Y., and the chance to work with a dramaturge (Melanie George) and a costume designer (Harriet Jung) for the first time. She has also invested more in lighting design, by her husband and frequent collaborator, Roderick Murray.

“I’ve been able to say, ‘Rick, you’re actually my hired lighting designer, not just my husband who’s going to do this for free,’” she said, laughing.

Ms. Bartosik spoke about the “slow burn” of becoming a choreographer and the process behind “I hunger for you.” These are edited excerpts from that conversation.

Tell me about not wanting to choreograph.

When I left Merce, I was never going to be a choreographer. That was the last thing I wanted to do. I was working for this amazing part of history, and I was like, “What could I ever add?”

I didn’t want to commit, to be honest — to that life, to having to scramble. But the more I peeled back the layers of that interest, I was like, “Yeah, this is really who I am.”



Ms. Bartosik rehearsing her dancers at Lumberyard. “I hunger for you” comes, she said, “from my response to what I feel is the rage and the sorrow that we are carrying in our bodies at this moment in time.”
Credit Lauren Lancaster for The New York Times

How did making your own work compare to dancing for other people?

I remember thinking, There's something in this body that these really fantastic male artists haven't gotten to. So what is that? Only I can access it. I spent a long time in the studio by myself. The first few pieces I made, I worked only with women.

What was the starting point for “I hunger for you”?

If I were to put it into one line, it came from my response to what I feel is the rage and the sorrow that we are carrying in our bodies at this moment in time. It doesn't matter what our ideologies are; I think that in our culture, there is so much we carry in our bodies, and how do we deal with those things?

I started with all these questions about religion and faith. Faith is still something very deep in this work, but not faith connected to religion. It's bigger than that.

Did those questions have to do with your family?

My siblings and I had, at first, a pretty conservative Catholic upbringing, and then my parents joined an evangelical church. I remember going to these churches and seeing people go into states — speaking in tongues, slaying in the spirit. The power of believing in something changed their bodies.

I wasn't sure what my own belief was. I was just like: “Oh! Wow.” Watching people have such deep faith, it imprinted itself on me as this crazy physical phenomenon. Like, how did you do that? How did that happen?

In rehearsal, there was almost a feeling of exorcism.

There is a deep essence of pulse, or what I've started to call life force. It's a very different place than I've ever been with my body or my practice, which is built a lot on restraint.

You've collaborated with your husband on many projects. Is that challenging?

It's tricky, and at the same time, I don't think I could be with somebody who wasn't deeply involved in my work, because it's become my whole being. My body wakes him up at night because I'm trying to figure out a problem, and he feels that energy radiating from me. He'll sit up and say, “Are you choreographing again?”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/30/arts/dance/kimberly-bartosik-i-hunger-for-you-bam.html>