

# *We Do Our Best*

Choreography and Direction: Liz Santoro

Artistic Collaboration: Pierre Godard

Dancers: Mélanie Giffard, Cynthia Koppe and Liz Santoro

Costumes: Reid Bartelme

Danspace Project Commision

Production Support by FUSED (French U.S. Exchange in Dance)

FR Premier: March 27 Festival Artdanthé, Théâtre de Vanves

US Premier: April 12-14 Danspace Project at St Marks Church, NY

Beginning with the assertion that the presence of an outside gaze creates a performative action upon an individual, this work explores what is taken and what is given in the exchange between watching and being watched. It focuses on the perceptions of strength and weakness experienced in holding the attention of another. What happens if one does not remain in places where one is strongest? What strength is revealed in the act of subjugation? Through the lens of the female body on stage *We Do Our Best* investigates the performer's position as an entity to be commanded, to be looked at, to be exposed.



## “Anatomy is destiny”

Drawing from my experience performing in vastly different types of work over many years, my anatomical and neuroscience studies and an investigation of body postures, fashion and film during the political movements of the 60's, I am attempting to understand what is intrinsic to how we perceive and experience power on stage. The highly choreographic film *Playtime* (1967), by Jacques Tati, was an initial well of visual information as well as a kinesthetic reference for this work. This led to examinations both into the political climate and changes occurring in fashion during this era, which revealed a strong accordance with shifts in female physical comportment. Using this connection between postures resulting from an external gaze and the physical and neurological act of performing on stage, we set to work in attempt to create a more intuitive means to participate inside of a theatrical structure.



The current image of a woman is overloaded with a ceaseless renegotiation of position. A narrative we continuously recreate and edit based off of visual and social cues. This piece proposes a starting point wherein the observer creates an image in the absence of any visual cues. The suffusing sound and vibrations of what is perhaps an old air filtration system launches the performance, followed by the clicking of several women walking in high-heeled shoes that seem to approach and retreat. Eventually one woman walks into the space, poised and staid, dressed in 60's Yves Saint Laurent-style tailleur. She instantly conjures a recognizable image to match the one created from the sound alone. Yet once she fully arrives there is a shift in her presence, her gaze, her body carriage. Her intention is nearly imperceptible except that the earlier narrative of observation can no longer be employed. She is ultimately joined on stage by another woman and then another, each passing through very quiet states that loudly interact with those observing them through exchanged scrutiny. While building a reality inside the inescapable make-believe of a theatrical context, the piece then suddenly proposes a very brief theatrical piece inside of itself. A synchronized choreography and text, pursuing a traditional type of perfection and detail, arises to temporarily appease a tension. With the atmosphere now shifted from this awkward arrival, the piece then pushes to find its way back to brave exposure and exchange inside the observed observer observing its observed observers. The performance continues to employ methods of diverting from the anticipated path while thrusting the performers into places where both subjugation and triumph lie in ugliness as much as in beauty.

## References

The research that led to the initial investigations of *We Do Our Best* began at Dance Theater Workshop in New York, where I was a Fresh Tracks Artist in Residence. The artistic team of artistic collaborator, two dancers and myself were then invited to participate in SKITe 2010 where we worked at the CCN in Caen and at IMEC (Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe) which was exhibiting the design archives of Yves Saint Laurent. Further development for work took place at ImPulsTanz, Vienna International Dance Festival, in July and August of 2011. Material for the piece has been shown at The Judson Church in January 2011 and Danspace Project at St Marks Church in April 2011. It is a Danspace Project Commission and the recipient of a FUSED grant from the French Embassy and NEFA. The piece will premier in the festival Artdanthé at Théâtre de Vanves in March 2012 and at Danspace Project at St Marks Church in New York City in April 2012.

## Liz Santoro (US) choreographer

Liz Santoro is a New York and Paris-based choreographer and performer. Hailed as «wickedly smart» by the *New York Times*, her choreographic work has been presented in New York at PERFORMA09, Movement Research, Chez Bushwick, Judson Church, Dixon Place, Brooklyn Arts Exchange, The Field, Danspace Project, The Chocolate Factory and Dance Theater Workshop. Her work has also been shown in Belgium at The Forum and in France at Théâtre de Vanves and the festival «Il Faut Brûler Pour Briller».

In 2009 she was a recipient of the danceWEB scholarship at ImPulsTanz in Vienna and became a 2010 artist in residence at Dance Theater Workshop as part of the Fresh Tracks Program. She was a participant in the fifth edition of SKITe directed by Jean-Marc Adolphe and an artist in residence at ImPulsTanz in July and August 2011.

She studied Vagonova ballet technique at the Boston Ballet School, graduating from their Professional Division at the age of seventeen. With the intention of becoming a surgeon, she then attended Harvard University where she completed a Bachelor's degree in neuroscience. Permanently postponing her medical studies she began rigorously training in improvisation, the physical modality of Trisha Brown, the techniques of Body-Mind Centering® and Klein, while continuing a practice in ballet and anatomical studies. Performing contemporary dance work since 2003, both in New York and internationally, her dance work as an interpreter for others has moved through an expansive, diverse and exacting range of choreographic work. Among these artists, she has worked with Jack Ferver, Trajal Harrell, Sam Kim, Heather Kravas, Jillian Peña, Eszter Salamon & Christine de Smedt, Emily Wexler, David Wampach and Ann Liv Young. She has also performed in the theater work of John Jahnke/Hotel Savant, Charles Chemin, Pierre Godard and collaborated with visual artist Ryan McNamara.

**Cynthia Koppe (US)**  
performer

Cynthia Koppe was born in Singapore and lives and works in New York. She has had the pleasure of working with Marina Abramovic, Kira Blazek, Will Rawls, Ellis Wood and Bill Young. In addition to projects with Liz Santoro she is currently a member Shen Wei Dance Arts. She graduated from Cornell University with a degree in Sociology and Dance. Cynthia is also a bodyworker and Pilates instructor.

**Mélanie Giffard (FR)**  
performer

Mélanie Giffard, born Caen, France, has studied contemporary dance since the age of four with Astrid Lemoine and Jacky Auvray, for whom she also danced. She obtained her EAT (Examen d'Aptitude Technique) in 2006. She was a participant in SKITe in 2010. She has worked with choreographers Daniel Clifton, Herman Diephuis, Maude Le Pladec and Cie Fattoumi/Lamoureux.

**Pierre Godard (FR)**  
artistic collaborator

An engineer by training, Pierre Godard has worked in theater as technician, assistant lighting designer, props manager, stage manager, assistant director and director. He has worked with Jean-Michel Rabeux (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare, *Le Corps Furieux*, *La Barbe Bleue*, *Les Quatres Jumelles*), Sylvie Reteuna (*Snow White* by Robert Walser), Sophie Lagier (*Crave* by Sarah Kane), Valère Novarina (*L'Acte Inconnu*) and Liz Santoro (*Good Girl*).

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