

METROWEEKLY

Unlimited

Christopher Morgan is focused on growing his choreography career as well as D.C.'s dance community

By Doug Rule

Photography by Todd Franson

Published on March 29, 2012

When he lived in New York, dancer and choreographer Christopher Morgan would occasionally perform the art world equivalent of go-go dancing for parties at venues including the Supper Club in Times Square and Webster Hall. It was an easy way to make a few hundred bucks.

"I'd paint my entire body white and just wear this little tiny unitard and spin fire onstage," he laughs.

Another time, he appeared in a movie with Kate Winslet – an all-star but poorly distributed art-house film musical, 2005's *Romance & Cigarettes*. "Kate Winslet is singing in it and she comes out of this burning building that's on fire, and I'm standing there spinning fire and we dance around together," he says.



Christopher K. Morgan

Photo by Todd Franson

Spinning fire? Chalk it up to Morgan's Hawaiian heritage. "As a little kid, my older brothers and sisters and I, we did all these different Polynesian dances from all over the world that my parents and some close aunts and uncles had taught us," he says. "We even did a handful of community shows.

"That was my first dance career," he adds. "It ended by the time I was 7, so half the time I forget to even mention it."

In fact, Morgan, born and raised in Orange County, Calif., didn't get back into dance until he was a senior in high school, where classmates turned him on to ballet. He took up more dance classes while a student at the University of California, Irvine.

Last year, Morgan started his own dance company, Christopher K. Morgan & Artists, as the resident company of D.C.'s CityDance. This weekend sees the debut of his first evening-length work, *Limited Visibility*, which explores what we hide in our everyday lives. "Of course, like many other gay people," says the openly gay artist, "there's a period of life where you're hiding that or revealing that or grappling with that. [But the work also explores] all of the different things that we struggle with as individuals [gay or straight]." Lighting plays a key role in the piece, isolating, even interrogating, dancers, making their movements and activities more intimate, personal. Morgan is one of six dancers appearing in the piece.

The 36-year-old first started working full-time with CityDance in 2007, when he moved from New York to be the rehearsal director and resident choreographer for its ensemble company. He held that job until last spring when the organization folded the CityDance Ensemble, replacing it with his eponymous company. Morgan & Artists is just one of three branches of the CityDance organization, which also includes a tuition-based education center at Strathmore and a community-enrichment initiative focused on area after-school programs.

Prior to his work with CityDance, Morgan had danced with the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange as well as the Washington National Opera, but his home base was in New York. He met his partner of nearly seven years there, fellow dancer/choreographer Kyle Lang. "I was asked to be a guest artist for a company based in New York," he says. "And [Kyle] was in that company. The best thing out of that gig that I got was him."

Morgan only occasionally incorporates his Hawaiian or Polynesian heritage into his dances. But does he still spin fire, by lighting an oil-soaked orb that's tied to a rope and swinging it around, as he did on film?

"Only recreationally," he says. "I've not had a reason to do it in a show in a long time."

Where's Kate Winslet when you need her?

Christopher K. Morgan & Artists presents Limited Visibility Friday, March 30, and Saturday, March 31, at 8 p.m., at the Alden Theatre, 1234 Ingleside Ave, Mclean, Va. Also Saturday, April 21, at 8:15 p.m., and Sunday, April 22, at 3 p.m., at the CityDance Studio Theater at Strathmore, 5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda. Tickets are \$25. Call 202-347-3909 or visit citydance.net or christopherkmorgan.com.