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Taking Off

How Six Breakout Choreographers Began Their Journeys

However you define “emerging,” it takes longer to get there than you’d think. The six dance artists here have made ripples in certain circles. They are now on the cusp of making waves in the larger dance world.

Christopher K. Morgan Washington, DC

Christopher K. Morgan is a storyteller on the page and stage. For Morgan, 35, writing and choreographing go hand in hand. His choreography ranges from his bold, embodied, and deeply personal solos like *The Measure of a Man* to his elaborate group work like *+1/-1*, where dancers create visual labyrinths for the audience to follow and get lost in. His work strikes a personal chord with audiences through his memoir-style of choreography, and yet his abstractions leave plenty of room for imagination.



Morgan was drawn to choreography while studying creative writing at UC Irvine. “Because of my writing, I was looking at dance from a narrative aspect, and that



lent itself to me wanting to create work of my own,” he says.

In two companies that Morgan worked with early on in his career—Malashock Dance in San Diego, and the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange in the greater Washington, DC, area—Morgan was encouraged to contribute

to the choreographic vision. “I was able to explore in environments that were low-key and safe.” Morgan also danced with David Gordon in New York. “My sense of process is influenced by him in the way he would often ask the dancers to manipulate his material.” During his time working with Michael Keegan-Dolan of Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre, Morgan learned about risk taking, and “to take a lot of time to investigate an idea.” Performing as a dancer with the Washington National, Houston Grand, and New York City Operas added to his eye for theatricality.

Morgan keeps journals about travels, memories, and conversations, then turns those musings into theatrical expositions. Sometimes his own writing ends up in the piece. In *Thirst* (2009), his work about greed, overconsumption, and global climate change, a parable is told in multiple languages throughout the evening.

Although Morgan has created more than two dozen works during his choreographic career, it wasn't until he became a resident choreographer of CityDance Ensemble in Washington, DC, in 2007 that his name began to be known. His position at CityDance gives him the support to create on a cadre of dancers, to put his work forward, and to not be pinned down by labels. “Part of the allure in coming to DC was that I didn't know where I fit in New York, whether I was uptown or downtown.” But it hasn't been easy to make his voice heard, even to himself. By working in a less dance-centric community and one so focused on politics, Morgan feels pressure to consider presenters, the diplomatic community, and his board while building new audiences. “All of those things make me want to edit myself. I think the hardest thing is to make sure I follow my dream.”

Next project: *Currency Exchange* is a new work partially inspired by Morgan's recent travels (see “Dance Matters,” page 18), to premiere at American University April 8 and 9. —*Emily Macel Theys*