



March 2012

KRUPSAW | LESCAULT | MORGAN | ROSNER | WATERFORD CONCERT SERIES





Turning on the Lights

AN INTIMATE LOOK AT THE CREATIVE PROCESS | BY DONNA CEDAR SOUTHWORTH



Christopher K. Morgan

A dancer walks onto a stage, turns on a light and proceeds to perform a not-traditionally-performed-in-public action. Another dancer walks onto the stage, turns on his own light and proceeds to perform yet another nontraditional action. And another and another, and so the dance goes.

These vignettes are all part of acclaimed dancer/choreographer Christopher K. Morgan's full-length work *Limited Visibility*, which makes its world premiere at the Alden Theatre in McLean on March 30-31. The modern dance performance caps off a series of educational and culturally enriching events this month during the first of Alden's Artist-in-Residence series. Activities include two modern dance workshops, an open rehearsal of *Limited Visibility* and a pre-performance chat with members of Christopher K. Morgan & Artists, the resident dance company of D.C.-based CityDance.

After hearing Christopher Morgan lecture and seeing his *Limited Visibility* as a work-in-progress, Sarah Schallern, the Alden's performing arts director, hit upon the idea of a residency. "I wanted to create a situation where we would have a relationship and make it easier

for people to understand modern dance," she says. Upon seeing a portion of *Limited Visibility*, says Sarah, "It made sense. [The dance] spurred conversation, and that's what people in this community like—they like to have their brain tickled.... Since this piece is about...things that are hidden or what we do in private—and with so many people in our community who work for the CIA..., dealing with things they can't tell everyone—it just connected." The Alden Theatre's Artist-in-Residence program, says Sarah, allows audiences to "come in and have a relationship with the artist, and then when it comes time for his world premiere, they'll [more fully grasp] it."

Named one of six breakout choreographers in the United States by *Dance* magazine, Christopher says that *Limited Visibility* evolved from the desire to create the intimacy of a small space within the context of a larger space. "Very fortunately, I was performing in really large, beautiful venues," he says. "And as I was watching my work on these stages, I started to miss the intimacy that happens in small venues." It occurred to him to use light as a way to create smaller spaces and an intimate feeling. "I want the audience to have this feeling [that]



they want to move closer—literally in their seats—closer to the edge of their seat to look closer at this intimate space,” he says.

Brainstorming about this idea, he thought, “Wouldn’t it be great if the dancers themselves could control the lighting? They walk into the space, they turn a light on, it creates this smaller space within this big stage, and makes everybody look forward. I started to imagine it, and [began to feel that] it could feel really intimate.... It’s almost like you’re voyeuristic, looking at something personal.”

Christopher fell in love with choreography while studying creative writing at the University of California, Irvine. And writing/journaling remains a vital ingredient of his choreography, for example, in pieces titled *Thirst* and *Ties that Bind*. “I think a title often can be a really great entry point,” says Christopher. “If the title gives you a little bit of information but also...evokes a little bit of your own way of thinking about something, then your mind is being led down your own path that your life experiences bring you to. Then you can start to look at something and layer meaning onto it for yourself as an audience member.”

Christopher elaborates on this point in his program notes, explaining that “if you just get two or three sentences from the [choreographer] that say, ‘I was thinking about this, it led me down this path, explore this path with me, here we go...’ how much richer will the audience members’ experience be? I think greatly. It doesn’t always have to be shrouded in mystery.”

He sometimes asks his dancers to write as a means of entering into the creative process: “In *Limited Visibility*, I’m asking the dancers to reveal something about themselves that normally they wouldn’t reveal in public. So that takes a little investigation of the self and some soul-searching. What are you willing to share, and how can we represent this in a way that is respectful to the artists who are sharing themselves on the stage? And also I want to tread that fine line between the evocative and provocative and [the] tasteful. We want to be able to investigate these things in ourselves, hopefully, so that the audience can see themselves in them....”

Christopher’s work has been seen worldwide. Of his premiere at the Alden, he says, “I hope audience members leave with a “little sense of wonder and awe at an image or a movement or a sense of beauty or athleticism.... I really hope people leave my performances with a feeling of something that lasts. Maybe...they see something several weeks later that reminds them of the show, or they always look at a light bulb just a little bit differently because of the way we use lights in the show.”

See the Calendar for details on the artist-in-residence events featuring Christopher K. Morgan & Artists. €

Alden Theatre’s Artist-in-Residence Program
www.aldentheatre.org

Christopher K. Morgan & Artists
www.christopherkmorgan.com



Top: Tiffanie “Ti” Carson; above: Christopher K. Morgan

Opposite: Meghan Pilling of Christopher K. Morgan & Artists in *Limited Visibility*
 Photo by Brianna Bland