Charging those dance batteries

ABOVE: Mira Cook, a member of the New York company Battery Dance, leads South Side Dance 3 students through warmup exercises Monday while she teaches a master class for each of the four levels of dance class at the school. Accompanied by representatives from the Fort Wayne Dance Collective, Battery Dance will teach master classes at several locations throughout the week.

RIGHT: Cook and her Battery Dance company will dance for the first time in the Midwest on Saturday at Arts United when it performs “The Durga Project.” Jonathan Hollander, founder of Battery Dance, will give an arts and economic development keynote lecture Friday at Cinema Center that is open to the public.

ON THE WEB
To see a video, go to www.journalgazette.net/videos
Battery Dance
Fort Wayne Dance Collective hosts cutting-edge dance company for performance and workshops

By Eddie Torres
Fort Wayne Reader

Since 1989, Fort Wayne Dance Collective has hosted a guest dance company to inspire, educate, entertain, and enhance the community.

This year FWDC welcomes Battery Dance from NYC. Founded in New York’s financial district in 1976, Battery is an anchor in the cultural life of Manhattan and a global ambassador for dance.

Battery Dance’s performance on April 1 at the Arts United Center will include the Midwest premiere of Battery’s “The Durga Project,” which weaves together the movement vocabularies, sonorities and aesthetics of the U.S. and India into a choreographic fantasy.

It’s not just a performance. Battery Dance will bring its Dancing to Connect program to Fort Wayne during a six-day residency. The Dancing to Connect program includes workshops, interactive events and performances that let FWDC students of all ages and abilities to take part in modern dance. Since its inception, the program has been successfully offered in more than 50 countries.

Tickets are $28 for adults, and $24 for students. Special discounted tickets $20 for groups of 10 or larger.

For tickets call 260.422.4226 or visit fwdc.org.

- Keynote Lecture/Party: Friday, March 31, 2017 from 6-7 p.m. in the Cinema Center theater.
- Creative Workshops: Battery dancers will be providing workshops and master classes at various FWDC outreach sites March 27-March 31, 2017. Call Fort Wayne Dance Collective 260.424.6574 for more information and to view a complete schedule.
- Public Master Class: Wednesday, March 29, 2017 from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in the FWDC Elliot Studio, 437 E. Berry St. Downtown, Fort Wayne.

Artistic Director for Battery Dance, Jonathan Hollander will be delivering Dance as a Tool for Diplomacy, a speech on the role of dance in engendering mutual understanding and respect across international and multi-cultural borders.

The keynote is open to the public and will be immediately followed by drinks and hors d’oeuvres from 7-8:30 p.m. Cost is $5.

Members of Battery Dance will teach a master class open to the public.

Cost is $25. Participants must register with FWDC by phone at 260.424.6574. Space is limited.
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Display of Creative Force

By Mark Hunter

Gannery Htoo is about to have the experience of a lifetime. Htoo is a junior at South Side High School and a student dancer in the outreach program of Fort Wayne Dance Collective. On April 1, Htoo and 24 other student dancers will take the stage with members of Battery Dance, the New York City-based dance company that will wrap up its six-day artist in residency with FWDC.

In addition to the specially created dance with the students in the outreach program, Battery Dance will perform the Midwest debut of The Durga Project, a dance piece that weaves aspects of the culture of India and the United States.

“I’m very excited,” Htoo said. “I’ve never danced outside my school.”

The 17-year-old’s excitement is easy to understand. For the past 40 years, Battery Dance has been one of the foremost dance companies in New York. The company has produced nearly 100 original dance works in public spaces and on stages around the world, presenting vibrant work that focuses on the disadvantaged and areas of conflict.

According to Mandie Kolkman, the recently named artistic director of Fort Wayne Dance Collective, the Battery Dance residency and its performance of The Durga Project is something the city should be proud of.

“Durga is a goddess in Shakti,” Kolkman said. “It’s relevant now to look at this goddess because she is a female power that rules the world. It’s exciting to show that Fort Wayne is open to other cultures.”

This performance of The Durga Project is special because Battery Dance is bringing the Indian dancer Unnathi H.K., one of the leading classical dancers of his generation in India, to serve as the catalyst for the production. The dance piece intertwines movement vocabularies, sounds and aesthetics of the diverse cultures found in India and the U.S.

This exemplifies the dualities of destruction and creation and the all-powerful force of creativity. Durga is also the name of a raga that is characterized by a sequence of musical notes that is intriguing and soothing, rich and compelling in its cadence.

Fort Wayne Dance collective has had its artist in residency program since 1989. Each year FWDC brings in a professional dance company to hold workshops and stage performances. Normally the residency is only three days. But this year Battery Dance will be here for six days.

Battery Dance artistic director Jonathan Holland will give a lecture titled “Arts and Economic Development” on March 31 at Cinema Center. Holland is the founder of Battery Dance and is considered one of the most influential and creative choreographers of his generation. He established arts education residencies at primary, middle and high schools in New York and served as Fulbright lecturer on dance in India in 1992 and Fulbright specialist in Malaysia in 2011.

Battery Dance is an integral part of the arts community in New York. Kolkman said FWDC is in many ways similar to Battery Dance. The FWDC outreach program has programs at South Side, McMillen Park Community Center, Veterans Hospital, Lakeside Middle School, Turnstone, Weiss Park Elementary, Wayne High School, Homestead High School, North Side High School, Memorial Park Middle School and IPFW’s theater and dance departments.

Battery Dance will visit those sites to give master classes and workshops. The company will also hold a public master class on Wednesday, March 29 from 5:30 p.m. in FWDC’s Elliot Studio.

Kolkman, who studied arts administration and dance at Butler University, sees the work of organizations like Battery Dance and FWDC as vital to the health communities.

“Fort Wayne is growing rapidly,” Kolkman said. “We just have to do our city due diligence by serving them with the arts. We have to listen to the community. There is a great need to keep the arts at the forefront of economic development to serve people of all ages in the community.”

Dance is just one way to do that. Kolkman added that there are many ways for people to be involved in dance without actually dancing.

“One thing that kids didn’t realize is you don’t have to have a career in performance or teaching or choreography to have a career in dance,” she said. “You can help other people do that. We want to inspire our youth to seek ways to empower other people through movement.”

Htoo plans to take that thinking to heart. Though he always knew he wanted to dance, he doesn’t necessarily want to dance professionally after college.

“I have a video from when I was in third grade where I talked about wanting to be a dancer,” he said. When I go to college I plan to take dance as an elective. I want to become a DNR officer. I’m a big Boy Scout guy. I love the outdoors. When I dance I don’t think about what people think about me. I just enjoy dance for dance. I just want to be peaceful. I may not be good at it, but I just like the movement.”

But Htoo and his fellow outreach dancers will get a taste of what it’s like to be a professional when they prepare for their Battery Dance collaboration. Kolkman said students in the outreach program generally have a couple of weeks to work on a piece.

“With the Battery Dance Dancing to Connect program, the students won’t start rehearsing until the week of the performance,” she said. “It’s a crash course for these students. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. How often do you get to say that you’ve performed with a professional dance company?”

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THE DURGA PROJECT
FORT WAYNE DANCE COLLECTIVE
PRESENTS BATTERY DANCE
8 p.m. Saturday, April 1
Arts United Center
303 E. Main St., Fort Wayne
$24-$28, 260-422-4226
or www-fwdc.org

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www.whatzup.com
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