

Seattle's Karin Stevens Dance melds movement and kinship

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"Parts of the Whole," choreographed by Karin Stevens. (Jim Coleman)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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Karin Stevens' parents lost their home on Magnolia's Perkins Lane in a [landslide](#) in the 1990s.

“That informed so much of my life’s work in terms of the body and ecology and how we can return to the human as interdependent and not separate from the Earth,” said Stevens. “Our bodies are vital, important sources of knowledge and evolution and healing and transformation, returning us to a way of moving that’s more sustainable for all of life.”

Established in 2009 as a vehicle for Stevens' own choreography, Seattle-based Karin Stevens Dance is now presenting its first program to include works choreographed by company dancers. The five contemporary works of “KSD & Kin” will be performed Jan. 13-14 at NOD Theater on Capitol Hill.

“I’ve always had a heart for community and the ecosystem of dance and trying to contribute beyond my own work,” she said. “I know how hard it is to put your own work out there.”



Karin Stevens. (Michelle Smith-Lewis)

Before the pandemic, Stevens was focused on collaborative conceptual works. Climate-themed “Sea Change Within Us” in 2019 included a large-scale installation and commissioned music incorporating interviews with scientists and a Duwamish tribal leader. “Record of the Anthropocene Movement” was a collaboration with photographer Omar Willey and composer Paul Rucker that considered the changing landscape of the Pacific Northwest.

Last year, Stevens conceived “KSD & Kin” to use her practical experience as an independent choreographer to support developing dance-makers. The resulting premieres by KSD company members Sara Caplan and Anja Kellner-Rogers will open the show. Caplan’s “Measured Reflections” explores the individual as it exists in community, while Kellner-Rogers’ solo work, “Solitary Rhythms,” considers the individual alone.

“In their work, there is a sense of kinship,” said Stevens. “There’s a sincere exploration of the challenges of being human and a desire to evolve beyond those challenges towards something that creates meaning, beauty and goodness and connection for a better life. That’s what I can see in their works.”

Stevens’ own work, including the solo premiere “Remember River,” will make up the second half of the program. Set to music by Jeff Grienke, the piece was inspired by a line from Mary Oliver’s poem “[The Moth, The Mountains, The Rivers.](#)”

“Who can imagine in what heaviness the rivers remember their original clarity,” recited Stevens. “The end of the poem is, ‘We are only one design of the moving, the vivacious many.’”

Stevens’ “Parts of the Whole” premiered last summer at the Seattle International Dance Festival and is set to “Dark Waves,” a piano piece by John Luther Adams, composer of Pulitzer Prize-winning “Become Ocean.” The dance explores the relationship between individuation and wholeness and what shows above the surface versus what is hidden beneath it.

Her “A Small Space of Wildness” was originally a place-based improvisation developed in Stevens’ backyard across the seasons. Set to commissioned music by local composer Heather Bentley, it developed into a series of multimedia video essays (one of these is [viewable online](#)). The stage production for “KSD & Kin” will feature new costumes and reworked music.

Stevens’ musical roots are as deep as her connection with nature.

“KING-FM was part of the landscape of my life growing up,” she said. She attended Franklin High School — the same school as choreographer Mark Morris — and credits Morris as an inspiration for her frequent use of live music. Her graduate mentor at Mills College, Molissa Fenley, emphasized the importance of the relationship between music and movement, something Pacific Northwest Ballet audiences know from Fenley’s work “State of Darkness.”

Even when using recorded music, as Stevens is doing for “KSD & Kin,” she says, “Music is so important to me. It’s something I think very deeply about and consider.”

Stevens hopes that the “KSD & Kin” program will develop into an annual opportunity for talented local choreographers to collaborate with local musicians in the creation of new work.

“It’s ‘KSD & Kin’ because kin is family,” she says. “They’re part of the inner circle.” And for Stevens, dance is how the circle grows.

“KSD & Kin”

Jan. 13-14; NOD Theater, 1621 12th Ave., Seattle; \$20-\$35; ADA compliant; 1 1/2 hours with one intermission; 206-949-8643, karinstevensdance.com.

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