

4/15-16: CONDER/dance performs 'Strangers' in Tempe

by **Alexander Foote** - Apr. 12, 2011 10:49 AM
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Tempe-based **dance** company CONDER/dance is planning to shake up the Arizona art scene this weekend.

'THE COMFORT OF STRANGERS'

What: CONDER/dance presents its first evening-length work featuring choreography by artistic director Carley Conder.

When: 8 pm. Friday and Saturday, April 15-16.

Where: Tempe Center for the Arts, 700 W. Rio Salado Parkway.

Admission: \$18-\$30, \$3 off for students.

Details: 480-350-2822, conderdance.com.

Drawing inspiration from 18th century French queen Marie Antoinette, Canadian pianist Glenn Gould and rocker Elvis Presley, along with some choreography and a little abstract imagery, it will perform its first original evening-length production "The Comfort of Strangers" at Tempe Center for the Arts.

"I wanted to explore the ways in which we all seek to forge authentic connections," director and choreographer Carley Conder said. "I think today, when we can be connected every minute of every day and still be alone the entire time, it might be even more important and more difficult to find not only the 'connect,' but the real human connection we crave."

For Conder, the best way to explore human

connection is through the characters of Gould and Antoinette.

While the piece has no formal story, Conder conceptualizes these two in a current-day romance. Here, their search for meaningful connection plays out through a series of elegant **dances** using costumes and music from Gould, Johann Sebastian Bach and Presley.

"I wanted to show these extreme characters who have been over the edge and are desperately searching for something real," Conder said.

The seven members of the all-female dance company switch roles throughout the show, taking turns in Antoinette's Victorian wig or Gould's tuxedo. Multiples of the same character often dance together.

"I really enjoy working with these characters," Jessica Mumford said. "It's beyond who we know them as, beyond who they were at home. We are trying to understand what can make a famous person, who is so approachable, so lonely."

Mumford's involvement with the show goes beyond **dancing**; she created a short film to be screened as part of the show.

The dancing doesn't limit itself to the stage. The performers mingle in the lobby, the balconies and the audience, providing an immersive experience.

Conder is not the only choreographer working on "The Comfort of Strangers." She enlisted Ashleigh Leite, a choreographer native to the Valley who returned last year after 15 years of working in New York.

"The dance scene in Phoenix is pretty stagnant," Leite said. "Carley is one of the few people who are really doing something different. Maybe she'll reinvigorate the whole thing."

Leite worked on one of the pivotal routines and is the originator of the Marie Antoinette character who is meant to be a representation of modern female stereotypes.

"We wanted to create something extremely unique that would really stand out." Leite said.

"You're just not going to see anything else like it around."

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