

Finding a New Artistic Language



Bennington's Sgorbati studying the science of dance at EMPAC

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Arts and Entertainment Editor

TROY, N.Y. — There is a special language to improvisational music, to unchoreographed dance; just ask any jazz musician or modern choreographer.

Bennington College's Susan Sgorbati always knew that such a language existed, she just could not quite understand it for many years. Then she found it, and it sounded a lot like science; now she is in the process

of talking in that language to anybody who will listen.

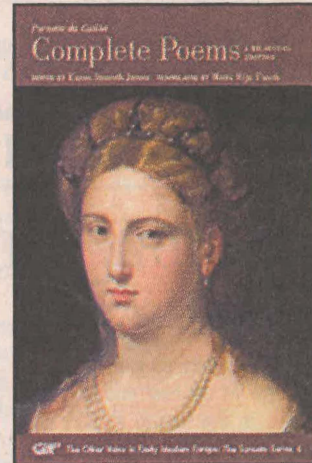
She and her dancers will be speaking that special language of dance this weekend, as part of a creative research residency at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center, with an open studio Saturday, April 14, at 4 p.m.

Sgorbati — dancer, teacher, choreographer, mediator — is nothing if she is not an intellectual.

See *SGORBATI*, page 2D

Peter Crabtree

Susan Sgorbati, a Bennington College faculty member, is serving a residency at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.



Book cover of Marta Rijn Finch's translations of poems "Complete Poems of Pernetle du Guillet"

Local poets, open mic at the Café

BENNINGTON — As part of local Poetry Month events and led by local poet Marta Rijn Finch, several local poets — including Stephen Sandy — will read their works at South Street Café on Saturday, April 14, with a poetry open mic to follow. Poetry readers include Sandy, Ted Gilley, Lucie McKee, Elizabeth McHugh, and

From Arts Weekend Front

Bennington College dance professor in 'science' residency at RPI

SGORBATI, from page 1D

tual adventurer, so gaining access to some of the best and brightest minds in the nation at RPI is a huge step in her continuing dialogue about the scientific language of improvisational dance.

Talking this week in her residency office at EMPAC, Sgorbati said she has been doing improvisational dance work at Bennington College for 20 years — “no choreographers. There is not a director, not a map, not a preconceived notation that sets up what will occur” — but from the beginning she saw patterns to the dance genre, it just took a while to find the words to describe them.

“As I was working with dancers and kind of being the outside observer, and feeding back to them what I was seeing,” she said. “We would have this conversation about what was occurring, partic-



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Susan Sgorbati — talking, teaching, a new language.

ularly with the more advanced dancers ... certain patterns started emerging. I noticed them and started naming them.”

There were simple patterns, and titles, she said: “Pathway,” “main event,” “chorus” and “wave” — “These patterns would occur, without any plan for it ... but it would not be chaotic, structures emerged,”

The break, Sgorbati said, occurred about a decade ago when she changed offices at Bennington College and moved into the science building, and when evolutionary biologist Bruce Weber moved next door.

“We started having conversations,” she said. “Up to that point, I was not involved with science at all ... (but) in this conversation

with Bruce, he said “Susan, haven’t you been introduced to complexity?”

And Sgorbati finally heard the beginnings of the new language she had been searching for.

The result of her discovery and her continued study — “dialogues,” she calls them — with the minds of science is what Sgorbati calls the “Emergent Improvisation” dance form.

Sgorbati’s “emergent improvisation” dance form, she states in supplied material, is also inspired by dialogues with Dr. Gerald Edelman, founder and director of the Neurosciences Institute, and Dr. Stuart Kauffman of the University of Vermont.

Sgorbati attempted to explain her study during the interview, but the best summary may well be that provided in supplied material, “‘emergence’ is found in complex, interconnected systems, where there is enough order to create recognizable pattern, but also is open-ended to continuously bring in new differentiations that influence and modify the form. In linking the creative work of art making to the emergent process, a rich inquiry emerges

into how systems come together, transform, and reassemble to create powerful instruments of communication.”

Sgorbati’s visit to RPI is the inaugural EMPAC creative research residency, and she will be working for six weeks at EMPAC on matters related to her concept of Emergent Improvisation. There are three free public events related to this residency: Biologist Tim McGee talked this week on biomimicry, the open studio with Sgorbati and her dancers will occur on Saturday, and a talk by neurologist Marco Iacoboni called “Mirror Neurons and Our Capacity for Empathy,” will be offered Wednesday, May 9, at 7 p.m.

In addition to a packed schedule of discussions with groups and individuals at RPI, Sgorbati will have a chance to talk with both McGee and Iacoboni, to expand and refine her “Emergent Improvisation” ideas.

Sgorbati, in addition to her work on “emergent improvisation,” is a professional mediator, and the chairperson of Social Activism at Bennington College, where she has been on the faculty

for 25 years. She develops and supervises Bennington College’s conflict resolution curriculum and a mediation clinic for Bennington County, and mediates for the Vermont Human Rights Commission. She is currently also making “Convergence: The Emergent Improvisation Film,” with filmmaker Elliot Caplan.

Sgorbati also created the improvisational ensemble, “Materia Prima” which has performed at The Improvisation Festival in New York City, Improvised and Otherwise in Brooklyn, New York, and other venues in New England. She has done residency workshops with the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts for the last several years.

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EMPAC is located on the RPI’s Troy, N.Y., campus at 110 8th St. Parking is available in the Rensselaer parking lot on College Avenue. For information call 518-276-3921 or visit empac.rpi.edu.

Comic-Con nearby in Albany, N.Y.

COMICS, from page 1D

film, each stop will include exhibitor booths, animator portfolio reviews, costumes, and live superstar panels — all part of a recreation of the San Diego event experience.

geek mecca in San Diego — a fringe comic book convention that has grown into the pop culture event of the year.

The film was produced by Spurlock, Jeremy Chilnick, Matthew Galkin, and Thomas Till: and written by Spurlock and

the film’s release will give audiences a multi-dimensional look at the Comic-Con experience,” Ball said in supplied material.

The Palace Theatre is located at 19 Clinton Ave. Tickets are \$49.50,

Birth of a newspaper at discussion