

ARTS & CULTURE

Gray days, but vibrant stages

Our critics share ten hot choices for winter performances.

by **Kerry Reid, Irene Hsiao** and **Deanna Isaacs**

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New Music/New Dance

Chicago Center for Contemporary Composition and DanceWorks Chicago cocurate an evening of premieres by four collaborative teams: choreographer Brian Enos/composer Justin Weiss, choreographer Noelle Kayser/composer Ania Vu, choreographer Brandon DiCriscio/composer Benjamin Martin, and choreographer Marc Macaranas/poet Victoria Flanagan/composer Paul Novak. Paired by a “virtual speed date,” each team will present a new work in the intimate Logan Penthouse. Novak—who initiated contact with DanceWorks in 2022 and who is creating “a ghost story through a queer lens” with Macaranas and Flanagan—notes, “Each team had a completely different style of collaboration and process: for some, the dance came first, for others, the music, and others worked on them simultaneously and together.”

“The concept for our piece came from text that Ania wrote as the basis of her original composition,” says Kayser of her collaboration with Vu. “Pulling from themes of struggling to communicate, cross-culture peace offerings, and reclamation of voice—we developed a comic book-type narrative of an advanced alien species crash landing on earth. To survive they’re going to try and say hi.” Adds Vu, “There are two musical processes that happen throughout the piece: from gibberish vocal sounds to those that sound like actual words, and from unpitched and percussive sounds to pitched and melodic. These gradual transformations mirror the process of aliens slowly learning English and befriending humans despite the language and ‘cultural’ barriers.”

In addition to working with each other, some teams have looked outward to other media for inspiration—both music and dance were “inspired by a painting by Norman Lewis called *Untitled in Blue and Black*,” says Enos of his collaboration with Weiss. “Working with the score was a fun challenge. The music has large sections of unpunctuated drone-like sounds from the bass, and I tried to create moments of rhythm with the dancers and movement within those stretches of soundscape while still creating a cohesive feel between the movement and music. The DanceWorks dancers, as always, were wonderful to work with, and very game to experiment with different ideas.” 3/24, Logan Center for the Arts Performance Penthouse, 915 E. 60th St., <https://cccc.uchicago.edu/concerts-events/new-musicnew-dance>, free for students, \$20 general admission