

Friday and Saturday, December 7–8, 2018, 8pm
Sunday, December 9, 2018, 3pm
Zellerbach Playhouse



Merina Beranova

Pavel Zuštiak and Palissimo Company *Custodians of Beauty*

<i>Direction, Choreography, and Olfactory Design</i>	Pavel Zuštiak
<i>Performers</i>	Viktor De La Fuente, Emma Judkins, Justin Morrison
<i>Originating Performer</i>	Nicholas Bruder
<i>Music</i>	Christian Frederickson
<i>Lighting Design</i>	Joe Levasseur
<i>Set and Video Design</i>	Simon Harding
<i>Costume Design</i>	Ásta Bennie Hostetter
<i>Production Manager</i>	Christina Tang
<i>Dramaturgy</i>	Megan Carter
<i>Text</i>	Alexandra Collier

*Custodians of Beauty will be performed without an intermission
and will last approximately 85 minutes.*

Cal Performances' 2018–19 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

A Note from the Choreographer

In *Custodians of Beauty*, I am forging towards abstraction, minimalism, and restrained expressive modes while amplifying the potency of an image; human body as sculpture, emotional trigger, or a political symbol. The title of the work is a sardonic nod to Pope Benedict XVI's appeal to 250 artists in 2009—people as diverse as Cees Nooteboom and Zaha Hadid—calling them “custodians of beauty.” Susan Sontag defended beauty in her essay “An Argument About Beauty” and defined it as “gladness to the senses.”

Custodians evokes beauty as a concept that speaks to both change and permanence; beauty that can seduce, that is at the edge of terror; beauty that transforms us. The work indirectly ponders questions of the place of beauty in art and in life and the role of perception in our definitions of beauty. For decades, various arguments have been put forward against beauty. Where do we find beauty today and does it need our defense?

—Pavel Zuštiak

Lyrics of the song by Emily Dickinson:

A still—Volcano—Life—
That flickered in the night—
When it was dark enough to do
Without erasing sight—

A quiet—Earthquake Style—
Too subtle to suspect
By natures this side Naples—
The North cannot detect

The Solemn—Torrid—Symbol—
The lips that never lie—
Whose hissing Corals part—and shut—
And Cities—ooze away—

Pavel Zuštiak is a Slovak-American, New York City-based director, choreographer, and performer, born in the communist Czechoslovakia. When he was only 12 years old, he went to a ballet audition to offer moral support to a friend; they had the date wrong, and the pair showed up to what turned out to be the modern/

contemporary dance audition. By that time, the young artist had already tried his hand at a variety of art forms, but dance stuck. His friend only lasted a month; more than two-and-a-half decades later, Zuštiak is still going strong.

Zuštiak trained at the School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam. Since the debut of his Palissimo Company in 2003, Zuštiak has produced 10 increasingly ambitious works that have established him as a unique voice in New York's contemporary dance world. His works for stage and public spaces merge the abstract aspects of dance with nonlinear qualities of “theater of images,” creating multidisciplinary pieces rich in evocative imagery and piercing emotional resonance. Like some of his continental peers, Zuštiak has never thought of himself as solely a movement artist, instead making use of a variety of theatrical devices to create immersive choreographic experiences. Central to Zuštiak's work is the tension between the seen and the unseen, that which is expressed and that which is hidden.

Zuštiak is the 2015 New York Dance and Performance Bessie Award Juried winner for his “poetic layering of movement and visual imagery, conceiving the stage space as a decentralized world in which the corporeal body is the focus and canvas for a wide range of human expression.” He is also a 2015–17 Princeton Arts Fellow; a 2019 Bogliasco Foundation Fellow; the recipient of the 2013 LMCC President's Award for Excellence in Artistic Practice and the 2012 NEFA/NDP Production and Residency Grants; a 2010 Guggenheim Fellow; and a multiple Princess Grace Award winner (2018, 2014, 2007). His five-hour *The Painted Bird* trilogy received a 2013 Bessie Award nomination for Outstanding Production.

Zuštiak's work has been commissioned and presented by the Walker Art Center, Wexner Center for the Arts, American Dance Institute, New York Live Arts, PS122, COIL Festival, Abrons Arts Center, Baryshnikov Arts Center, La MaMa, and 92nd Street Y, among others, and has toured to Lake Placid Center for the Arts, Response Festival, Legion Arts, PADL West, Archa Theatre, Akcent Festival (Czech Republic), Bratislava in Movement, KIOSK

Festival, Slovak National Theatre, State Theatre Kosice (Slovakia), and the Bytom International Dance Festival (Poland).

Zuštiak was an artist-in-residence at the American Dance Institute, Gibney Dance Center, Walker Art Center, Wexner Center for the Arts, Cowles Center, Vermont Performance Lab, LMCC, Movement Research, Baryshnikov Arts Center, MANCC, Abrons Arts Center, Czech Center NY, and Grotowski Institute. His work has been funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, New England Foundation for the Arts, The Jerome Foundation, Trust for Mutual Understanding, National Performance Network (NPN), Princess Grace Foundation—USA, Department of Cultural Affairs, City of New York, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, New Music USA: Live Music for Dance Program, The Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Design Enhancement Fund, a program of the A.R.T./New York, CEC Arts-link, and The Greenwall Foundation.

Megan E. Carter (*dramaturg*) is a dramaturg and creative producer. She is on the faculty at CalArts and is the producing director of CalArts Center for New Performance. Carter served for seven years as the associate artistic director of WP Theater, where she was the dramaturg and line producer for all mainstage and developmental productions and workshops. She has worked with Ripe Time, SITI Company, the Rude Mechanicals, CSC, and TerraNova Collective. Recent projects include *Nightwalk in the Chinese Garden* by Stan Lai, an outdoor site-specific, immersive experience; the CNP New Works Festival at Teatr Studio, Warsaw; and Roger Guenveur Smith's *The Hendrix Project* at Under the Radar, NYC.

Alexandra Collier (*text*) is a playwright who has worked in the United States and Australia at Sydney Theatre Company, La Mama, Playwrights Horizons, New Group, Women's Project, New Georges, the Lark, and Dixon Place. Recent work includes *Together*, a new play with

songs (music by Heather Christian), which was workshopped at Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor and at Playwrights Horizons in New York; *Underland* (59E59, Off Broadway, terraNOVA Collective, New York); and *Take Me Home* (a mobile theater piece that took place in a New York City taxi, Incubator Arts Project, Other Forces Festival). Her play *Holy Day* was a Susan Smith Blackburn Prize finalist. Other awards/fellowships/grants include the Wheeler Centre Fellowship, Neilma Sidney Travel Fund, RE Ross Trust Playwrights Award, MacDowell Fellowship, and the Dame Joan Sutherland Award. Her musical *Triplight*, written with composer Greta Gertler, received a UCROSS Fellowship, a Space on Ryder Farm residency, and a Rhinebeck Writers retreat residency in New York and has been workshopped at The Tank; it was performed recently at Joe's Pub. Collier's play *Underland* is available through Playlab Indie. www.alexandracollier.com.

Jason Collins (*associate producer*) is a producer, administrator, and performer based in Brooklyn. In addition to his work with Pavel Zuštiak/Palissimo Company, Collins also associate-produced Big Dance Theater's *Cage Shuffle* at Notre Dame and *17c* at UNC—Chapel Hill and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. He has managed Pam Tanowitz Dance as an artistic associate since 2016 and served as a project assistant for BAM's DanceMotion USA, an international cross-cultural exchange program, from 2014–16. As a performer, Collins works with Pam Tanowitz Dance, Dylan Crossman, and The Bang Group, among others. He is co-founder of the HEWMAN collective and holds a BFA from the Juilliard School.

Christian Frederickson (*music*) is a New York City-based violist, composer, and sound designer specializing in performances with live music. He was a founding member of Rachel's, an instrumental band from Louisville, KY that released six albums on Touch and Go Records between 1995 and 2003. As an independent artist he has released five albums on Bandcamp and played concerts and recitals throughout the United States and Europe. This is Frederickson's

fifth full-length piece with Palissimo, previously having scored *Endangered Pieces* and *The Painted Bird Trilogy* (*Bastard, Amidst, Strange Cargo*). www.christianfrederickson.com.

Viktor De La Fuente (*performer*) is a visual artist, dancer, and performer. His work combines analog and digital art forms to create performance, dance, and video installations. Currently based in San Diego, his recent *Chicanadas* video series utilizes eccentric dances, everyday objects, and costumes to create personas that evoke current cultural themes specific to life at the Mexican and American border. Recently he has collaborated in works by Leslie Seiters, Justin Morrison, and Jenni Hong. He holds a bachelor's degree in visual arts from UC San Diego. viktordelafuente.com.

Simon Harding (*set and video design*) is an award-winning set and video designer for live performance, interested in modalities of performance that create a living space between objects and the body. He has designed nationally and internationally for theater, dance, and performance art work. Upcoming/recent projects include: *Strangers in Paradise* (Opera Omaha), *Shadow Play* (Trusty Sidekick), Jack Spicer's *Billy the Kid* (3 Headed Calf), *Up and Away* (Trusty Sidekick), and Act IV from *The Iceman Cometh* (Target Margin Labs).

Ásta Bennie Hostetter (*costume design*). New York City: *Dance Nation* (Playwrights Horizon), *Bobbie Clearly* (Roundabout Underground), *The Lucky Ones* (Ars Nova), *Miles for Mary* (Playwrights Horizon), *Porto* (WP Theater), *Wolves* (Lincoln Center), *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (Playwrights Realm), *Fulfillment Center* (MTC), *John* (Signature), *Men on Boats* (Playwrights Horizons), *10 Out of 12*, *Generations* (Soho Rep). Regional: *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night* (KCrep), *El Coquí Espectacular* (Two River), and *The Mystery of Love and Sex* (Signature Theatre). Member of Minor Theater, Target Margin Theater, The Mad Ones.

Emma Judkins (*performer*) is a freelance dancer and performer based in Brooklyn. Hailed by the *New York Times* as having “a natural, winning clarity,” she is currently dancing and making art with Pavel Zuštiak/Palissimo, Tere O'Connor, Anna Sperber, and Laurel Snyder. Past artistic and performing collaborations include Amber Sloan Dances, The Space We Make, Kendra Portier/BANDPortier, Phantom Limb Company, and Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion.

Joe Levasseur (*lighting design*) has collaborated with many dance and performance artists, including Big Dance Theater, Jennifer Monson, John Jasperse, Sarah Michelson, Neil Greenberg, Sally Silvers, David Dorfman, Donna Uchizono, John Kelly, and Brian Brooks. He is the lighting designer for the Joyce Theater's NY Quadrille series, and his lighting design work has been seen throughout the United States, Europe, and South America. Levasseur has received two Bessie Awards. Aside from working in the theater, he has received commissions to create several installation works, and is also a painter. Ongoing projects include lighting for Meredith Monk, Jodi Melnick, and Pavel Zuštiak. www.joelevasseur.com.

Justin Morrison (*performer*) is a dancer based in San Diego. Notable dance collaborations include the work of Sara Shelton Mann, Hope Mohr, AVYK, Leslie Seiters, Christine Bonansea, Wally Cardona, and Diego Piñon. Morrison was a member of the Amsterdam-based MAGPIE collective founded by Katie Duck. He has taught at the Amsterdam University of the Arts (AHK), the School for New Dance Development (SNDO), Codarts Rotterdam, ArtEZ-Arnhem, and the Korea National University of Arts (KNUA) in Seoul, and is presently a lecturer at San Diego State University.

Christina Tang (*production manager*) is a lighting designer, technical director, and production manager based in New York City. Recent credits: *Meaningful Conversation* (New Light Theater Project), *Madame Lynch* (The Drunkard's Wife), *Assembled Identity* (HERE), and *skin flick city* (Columbia Stages). christinaftang.com.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL/RESOURCES

Beauty at the Edge of Terror:**A Conversation with Pavel Zuštiak**

Walker Art Center Blog

by Ben Swenson-Klatt

<https://walkerart.org/magazine/beauty-at-the-edge-of-terror-a-conversation-with-pavel-zustiak>

Containing Multitudes**by Melanie George**

The work of Pavel Zuštiak and Palissimo contains multitudes. Perhaps because he entered artistic practice through film and television, his work is multisensory poetry. Our senses are sparked by movement, imagery, light, sound, and texture maintaining equal footing in process and presentation. The work is poetic in the way he conceives of his artistic concerns, and in the way others write about his work.

The *New York Times*' Claudia La Rocco says, "There is scant middle ground in Pavel Zuštiak's work. Violence and desire, fear and rapture, pain and giddiness—he traffics in extremes, often slammed against one another in uncomfortably close quarters." And in *The New Yorker*, critic Brian Siebert observes that a "vivid, often anguished imagination shines through."

Never movement for movement's sake, there is always purpose. More than dancing with intent, it is theme and intention by way of dancing. In watching the work, I am left with an impression of living, breathing bodies immersed in each moment. The performers are not portraying, they are *being*. In the world of Palissimo, both dancer and choreographer commit to plumbing the depths and the extremes of existence.

I should note that the world of Palissimo is *our* world. Sometimes in dance, we endeavor to present beauty as that which is separate from daily life—flawless, pristine, super human. Palissimo's work, however, is the most humane dancing. So while it may be theatrical, it does not engage in manufactured etherealism. It is passionate and sensitive to being alive in a world that can be, at times, terribly beautiful,

beautifully terrifying; constantly shifting; equal parts dark and light.

The title *Custodians of Beauty* is taken from a 2009 speech by Pope Benedict XVI given at the Sistine Chapel to a group of artists from multiple disciplines. In that speech he said:

This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart, and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration. And all this through the work of your hands... Remember that you are the custodians of beauty in the world.

For Zuštiak, this was a bold, yet vulnerable statement. Beauty is not untouched by danger, strife, and the mundane. This is not beauty as object or product, but, as Zuštiak says, "beauty that is all around us, that we may not notice."

Custodians of Beauty is a non-narrative work. Centered on perception and change, you will notice the establishment of form and shape, only to have it morph or repositioned. The recurring, sinuous shifting of these moving paintings over time begins to feel seductive and, at times, profound. Lighting design by Joe Levasseur, and a musical score by Christian Frederickson contribute to an overall impression of the performers living the piece, rather than manufacturing action for the stage. In featuring transitions and change, the incidental becomes the event. Each moment, before and after an event, is an event unto itself. Each moment is a moment worth experiencing.

Palissimo does not seek or cultivate a passive audience. Audience perspective is paramount in the presentation of the work. Our responses are improvisational moments generated from prompts within the piece. We are all players on the Palissimo stage. So much so that I find myself wondering if, in fact, there is a true audience. The work does not seek to entertain in a traditional sense. It challenges us to be fully present and committed to our experience.

In discussing his aesthetics, Zuštiak has employed the term "bespoke dancing"—that is to say, dances that are open to an audience's expe-

rience changing the pace of the dance. In turn, he asks that we trust our reactions and the vulnerability inherent to bearing witness to the piece. That we stay connected to our feelings, however uncomfortable or unfamiliar they may become. That we allow ourselves to move and be moved by beauty.

Melanie George is Audience Educator and Dramaturg at Lumberyard. Her comments here come from a pre-performance speech at the American Dance Institute in November 2015. Used with permission.

For booking, contact Palissimo's associate producer Jason Collins at jason@palissimo.org.

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—Pavel Zuštiak