

# The Oregonian

## **Dancing to Save Conduit**

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Shawn Vitt, The Oregonian

What could bring together national performers from Shen Wei Dance Arts and Gerald Casel Dance, devoted experimentalist Linda Austin, up-and-comers Key Turn Project, Portland dance icons Tere Mathern, Josie Moseley, Mary Oslund and Gregg Bielemeier, plus a passel of top ballet dancers, for a two-weekend celebration? Conduit.

Conduit Dance is a space and an idea, and for both reasons it's a vital and well-loved crossroads of Portland's dance scene.

Audiences usually think of it as the sweet little spot in the heart of downtown for many of the city's best contemporary dance performances, and it is that.

But it's also an important, affordable rehearsal space for the city's dance makers (and sometimes visiting ones), a place for them to try fresh ideas and get them performance-ready.

It's a place for classes, for beginners and experienced dancers alike.

And it's a primary meeting space for dancers of all sorts, sometimes in surprising combinations: You just might see a prominent ballet dancer here working with a cutting-edge experimental choreographer, each venturing out of her ordinary element in search of something fresh and extraordinary.

Now Conduit's in trouble, struggling with rising rent and the bad economy, and the city's dance scene is stepping up to help. For the next two weekends the benefit "We Are Conduit Dance" offers audiences a fascinating cross-section of the city's diverse dance styles and choreographic approaches -- all with the goal of keeping Conduit afloat.

Conduit's story is one more part of the survival puzzle for arts in Portland, where the struggling global economy has damaged the tight margins on which most arts groups operate. Many groups are fighting to keep their fragile funding bases from falling apart. Just a couple of months ago Oregon Ballet Theatre raised more than \$900,000 to keep its doors open.

Conduit operates on a much tighter budget -- \$40,000 to \$45,000 a year, almost all of which goes to programs and the space itself. "We really run a tight budget," co-director Tere Mathern said. "It's a volunteer-run space."

Now, Mathern says, the organization needs \$15,000 by Aug. 31 to cover all its bases and rebalance itself. The benefit performances will help raise a chunk of that -- and they should be great shows, too. The lineup:

**Program A, Friday and Saturday:** Josie Moseley, Oregon Ballet Theatre principal dancer Gavin Larsen, Gregg Bielemeier, Key Turn Project, Tere Mathern Dance (Saturday only), Linda Austin, and Ben Asriel of New York's GeraldCaseIDance, who's in town for a couple of months and teaching at Conduit while he's here.

**Program B, Aug. 7 and 8:** Oregon Ballet Theatre principal dancer Anne Mueller, site-specific troupe POV Dance, Tere Mathern Dance (Friday only), Conduit stalwart Jim McGinn, OBT soloists Candace Bouchard and Adrian Fry, Oslund + Co./Dance, and James Healey, an original member of the internationally prominent Shen Wei Dance Arts, who grew up in Grants Pass.

