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Q: Your site-specific "Raw" multimedia performance last weekend on the fourth floor of the Natural History Building was beautiful, with a lot of memorable images. How did you come up with it?

A: I'm really interested in architecture and spaces and in this blurring of a person, or body, and space. I'm especially drawn to buildings that are falling apart or decrepit in some ways.

Part of it is I go to these desolate buildings where you might see vines that are so strong creeping up on them. What I'm interested in is the seeming resilience of something that seems dead or decaying, yet there's all this life inside.

Q: You're mainly a dancer but you called yourself a multimedia artist for 'Raw'?

A: I'm beginning to question that. The reason I say multimedia is I sometimes create video and sound scores for my dance performances and I work with lights as well. A lot of dancers use light and sound, so I'm still questioning my use of multimedia as a description of my work.

Q: Why did you collaborate on "Raw" with (Champaign installation artist) Lori Caterini?

A: Anna Hochhalter put us together. She e-mailed me to tell me that Lori was working with dancers and she was wanting to do a piece with water. I was really intrigued with that because I'd been wanting to do a piece with water and fire. Lori gave me a CD of some of her work and it was really beautiful. We ended up collaborating at the new Pollinatarium and on "Raw." There is really something beautiful, mysterious and lonely about her work. I really felt her work would fit well with my aesthetics and the place.

Q: When and why did you decide to enter the MFA program at Dance at Illinois?

A: A year and a half ago. I think it's a luxury to be able to work mostly on your art, and that's a



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Photo by: Robert K. O'Daniell/The News-Gazette

STORY BY MERLI - - Sarha Haas, MFA student in dance in a dance studio on the UI campus in Urbana, Il. Wednesday morning October 28, 2009.

luxury I have not had in my life. Somebody told me about the program and said it would give me the time, space and resources to focus on my work.

Q: Where were you living before you came here?

A: Chicago. I actually took a couple of years off from dance to write a book while I was in Chicago. I also worked for a couple of dance companies, but I was interested in creating my own work. I learned a lot, but I think I have a very particular aesthetic and interest that I'd rather hone than be a body. I'm very independent in that way.

Q: When did you start dancing?

A: My mom put me in ballet when I was 3 and I hated it. I stopped dancing when I was 12 and she died. I'm not really sure what made me start again. Part of it might have been nostalgia. Also, I've always been a mover. When I was a kid, I was a huge tomboy. Once I discovered modern dance when I was 19 or 20, I began to enjoy dance again because it's a different kind of dance. It's more realistic than ballet.

Q: Do you have an undergraduate degree in dance?

A: Yes, from Columbia College. That's where I learned so much. I was so naive when I first went there. I probably didn't know what jazz or modern dance was and I remember going to observe a dance class and crying. I can't describe my feeling at the time, but I knew I had to be there. There was something compelling about it. It was probably all emotion and intuition and not much else on my part because I wasn't sure what I was seeing.

Q: Did you grow up in the suburbs?

A: No, I grew up in the country in Michigan. I graduated from high school with 46 people. I enjoy the country and the city.

Q: Do you have any plans for more performances here in the near future?

A: I've been talking to PACA (Preservation and Conservation Association) about doing a site-specific piece there because they have these bathtubs. I've had this idea of a performance piece that I would love to do in three bathtubs in a huge room, a kind of water meditation with three people in the tubs.

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