

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

December 2, 2015

[Andrea Estrada](#)

MERAKI: SOUL | CREATIVITY | LOVE

Listening to Rufus Wainwright's rendition of his own "Oh, What a World," choreographer Cherice Barton envisioned the songwriter sitting on a train or in an airport and putting pen to paper as he found beauty in the mundane. Struck by the simplicity of the song's lyrics and by the music that reached a powerful crescendo, she expressed her feelings in her own way — through dance.

That piece — *Oh What a World!* — is part of *Meraki: soul | creativity | love*, the fall dance concert presented by UC Santa Barbara's Department of Theater and Dance and Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Dec. 4 and 5, and at 2 p.m. Dec. 5 in UCSB's Hatlen Theater. Tickets are \$13 for UCSB students, alumni and faculty and staff members, and \$17 for all others.

Barton is known for choreographing Katy Perry's enthusiastically received appearance at the Staples Center in Los Angeles for the 2015 Grammy Awards. Barton recently joined the creative team of America's Got Talent as choreography associate, following her work with George Lucas where she choreographed Disney's "Strange Magic" by Lucasfilm Animation/ILM. As a choreographer and creative consultant, Barton has a unique eye for transforming dance into inspired, emotional and visually stunning work.

Directed by UCSB's Christina McCarthy, the concert also showcases the work of five student-choreographers, four of whom are completing their Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees. The other is completing a Bachelor of Arts degree. "Student choreographers, working in collaboration with student lighting and costume

designers, have made bold artistic statements and created vibrant stage pictures as their pieces unfold,” McCarthy said. “We are privileged to have an opportunity to see the rise of these young talented people.”

In ***rumi_nation***, for example, Sam Rose looks toward our inner thoughts regarding society and the balance of conformity versus revolution. She edited her own sound score using special effects noises and music samples to put the audience in the middle of a chaotic world of rote repetition keeping the characters insensitive to violence and mayhem. The juxtaposition of benign typing sounds and car crashes strikes an eerie note of banality [or mundaneness; mundanity is not a word] and obliviousness in the face of a world of tragedy. Her piece is quirky and humorous with the ever-present undertone of oppression and numbness. The uniform-like costumes by Maddi Carroll further underline the prisoner/cog-in-the-wheel ethos of the work.

Veronika Cohen, working with timeless music by Django Reinhardt and the more modern 101 String Orchestra playing *Take the A Train*, collides a modern movement vocabulary with 1940’s period costumes, colorfully revved up and revamped by Kim Pecache with vibrant fabrics. ***Midnight Limbo*** presents an eclectic world full of quirky individual who bumble, fumble and mingle amongst one another in the dead of night. The story of the dance is dreamlike and rambling. We know these people. They are both specific characters and emblematic of all of us; out on the town, looking for meaning and love, trying desperately to have a good time. From sorrow to agitation to seduction, the individuals on stage will leave you both bewildered and amused.

Sunny Smith delineates the space of the stage temporally and physically as one performer alternately confines and frees dancers from carefully placed tape squares on the floor in her piece titled ***Extinct Animals***. The effect of having the confined dancers exhibit more freedom of movement and the unconfined dancers trapped in a repetition of static poses creates an intriguing counter-intuitive juxtaposition of freedom and claustrophobia. The dance is very angular and layered with this motif reflected in the costumes of Maddie Berger, built out of layers of translucent and opaque fabrics.

In ***Con•Duc•Tiv•I•Ty***, Rachael Oczkus creates a beautiful study of geometry and energetic connection with her dancers. In costumes that are both free flowing and strangely tangled and contorted, the dancers often move in unison creating

diagonals, lines and clusters in space that open to reveal pairs of dancers tracing the energetic waves emitting from each other's bodies. The piece is both clearly classical, with music by Bach, and strangely modern with random episodes of the dancers clapping as they cut through the space expanding and contracting our sense of how much space the dancers have to move through.

Shenandoah Harris piece, **Nefesh | Ruach | Neshamah**, utilizes large fabric panels that differentiate the two-dimensional world of everyday life and the three dimensional space of enlightenment, awareness and connection. Through authentic, emotionally raw and energetic movement, the dancers explore both the inner space of their minds and the spaces created around flowing panels of white silk, coalescing and spreading apart, revealing the duality in our lives of seeking our own truth and finding truth in our interactions with others. The diaphanous and airy set design and stylized costumes by Ryan Howard help to create an otherworldly and transformative experience.

The choreographed dances are eclectic and strongly convey students' unique visions. Each piece showcased in the Fall Dance Concert represents the artistic voices of the choreographers. Through technical, sophisticated and energetic movements their visions come to life. With a wide variety of dance and beautiful costume designs the concert is sure to be eclectic and full of the creative spirit that is ever present in the UCSB theater and dance department.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.