

## **Morgan Thorson: HEAVEN**

### **The Tagline**

Minneapolis-based dancer and conceptual choreographer Morgan Thorson brings dance to the Midwest in a Ford F-Series flatbed truck, inculcates her University of Minnesota students in the ways of the Skinner Releasing Technique, (deconstructs Elvis's pelvic thrust-out) examines authorship and authenticity, and endeavors an ecstatic exploration of the intersection of religious and performative rituals in *Heaven*.

### **Origins**

A native of Connecticut, Morgan Thorson was teetered on what she remembers as "really amateur bad ballet and Isadora duncanesque creative movement." Later, she was involved in ongoing dance research as a member of Saturday Morning Music/Dance at PS 122. It was not until after her relocation to Minneapolis that – at the age of 30 – she began to pursue dance in earnest.

Her entrée into choreography came in the form of a one-year scholarship to the Zenon Dance School, whose mission is marked by equal parts innovation and accessibility. This blurring of the categorical boundaries separating the avant-garde from the mass cultural would come to be a trademark of her practice. It was at Zenon that Thorson first made the acquaintance of Kristin Van Loon and Arwen Wilder, the members of the sensation *Hijack*, with whom she co-founded the Concrete Farm dance collective in 1994. Thorson's career as an instructor specializing in the Skinner Releasing technique – a strategy for awakening bodily creativity, alignment and spontaneity – began in 2001. She continues to teach Skinner and other movement forms at the University of Minnesota.

### **Greatest Hits**

Pop cultural detritus, eclectic scores shifting seamlessly from Strauss to Springsteen, and physical oscillation collide in Thorson's work to produce a multi-layered and multi-sensory spectacle. In the site-specific *Flatbed Tour* (1996), her acrobatic leaps between the proverbial tightropes of take the form of a dance tour of the rural Midwest, undertaken with the Concrete Farm Collective in a Ford F-series truck doubling as a makeshift stage. In her more recent – and perhaps best known work to date – *Faker* (2005), Thorson examines the phenomenon of celebrity impersonation as a mode of postmodern appropriation. Commissioned by the Walker Arts Center and the Southern Theater, *Faker* is a choreographic investigation of authenticity conducted by the (re)animated specters of Elvis Presley, punctuated with video prompting, applause tracks, and disco balls.

### **Recent Work**

Drawing upon her longstanding efforts to unify the perceived duality of mind and body into "one whole" through rituals at once physical and spiritual; Thorson's current collaboration with the slow core crooners of Low, *Heaven*, points up the correlations between theater and worship so as to create "performance that is the sum of perfect gestures."

### **Influences**

Joan Skinner – innovator of the Skinner Releasing Technique: an innovative approach to dance and movement training taught by Thorson at the University of Minnesota

Concrete Farm – the dance collective comprised of Susan Scalf, Kristin Van Loon, and Arwen Wilder

Jennifer Monson – PS122 artist and creator of *Bird Brain*, an ongoing, site-specific dance and conservation piece

### **Collaborators, Co-conspirators**

LOW – the slow core ensemble of Alan Sparhawk and Mimi Parker

Karen Sherman – Bessie Award winning-dancer, Minneapolis *City Pages* Best Choreographer of 2009, and former Judson Church Production Manager

### **Incidentals**

Thorson had an out-of-body experience while practicing the Joan Skinner technique, which she identifies as the source of much of her subsequent production.

### **Sound Bytes**

"I'm trying to look at this as a laboratory experiment by just being (playful and being-out) in the moment, and by seeing what is really happening on stage"

On the out-of-body experience: "I couldn't feel my skin. I couldn't feel my bones...it's very psychedelic, because it's a real journey inside the mind and also the body, which are part of one whole. I know this sounds new-agey, but I felt like I was an energetic mass that was capable of anything."

"People are inspired, consciously and subconsciously, by the culture around them...I'm really curious about how people develop their persona... What is the authentic self, and what do we unconsciously acquire?"

### **Further Reading**

Erica H. Adams, "ICA/Boston Presents Faker, A Dance Performance by Morgan Thorson," *Berkshire Fine Arts*, November 30, 2007, [http://www.berkshirefinearts.com/?page=article&article\\_id=480&catID=2](http://www.berkshirefinearts.com/?page=article&article_id=480&catID=2).

Matt Peiken, "Motion Accomplished: Out of Body Experience Inspires Thorson's New Dance Work," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 13, 2003, <http://mattpeiken.com/Journalism/Dance-Theater/morganthorson.htm>

### **Further Viewing**

PS122 Presents "Heaven" by Morgan Thorson & LOW: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llz3Oty4o8I>

PS122 Fall 2009 Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgDOqhCkkZw>

Morgan Thorson in Kevin O's Video Haiku, *x4=Morgan Thorson*: <http://blog.videohaiku.com/2009/06/x4-morgan-thorson.html>

### **Press Quotes**

"Sampled pop culture dance moves applied to classical music collapsed high culture into low in a delightfully spasmodic dance version of air guitar. *Faker* is as fresh as YouTube and, as headily unpretentious as Twyla Tharp's innovations." (Erica H. Adams, *Berkshire Fine Arts*)

She "gives us the screwball comedy of post-modern dance" (City Pages, Best Choreographer 2008)

"A compelling ride" (Claudia La Rocco, *New York Times*)

"Powerhouse" (Claudia La Rocco, *New York Times*)

### **Coming Soon**

*Heaven* at PS122

Sun, Oct 25 - Fri, Oct 30

Wed - Fri 8pm, Sun 6pm,

Late Show: Fri, Oct 30 10pm