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## Making the cut: Inside the audition for 2013 Trolley Dances

by Kris Eitland

On the list of fears, dance auditions rank near the top, along with snakes, spiders, clowns, and public speaking. For dancers, the audition process is a mandatory part of training, and making the cut is everything.

“I want some improvising so I can see who you are,” Jean Isaacs shouted during an audition for [Trolley Dances](#) at the [White Box Theatre](#) on a recent Sunday. “We ran out of numbers at 110 and had to make more tags. Make sure your numbers are visible to the choreographers. ”



More than 100 dancers turned out for the Trolley Dances audition. Nearly 50 will perform site-specific dances over two weekends. Photo credit: George Willis

Along with Isaacs, four choreographers will create site-specific work along the trolley tracks near Barrio Logan over two weekends in late September and early October. For the audition, dancers had to learn a sequence in a few minutes and perform in groups of ten.

“I’m looking for six to eight dancers,” said Kate Watson Wallace, a dance maker from Philadelphia. “I’m interested in individuals and the choices they make.”

Wallace will have dancers perform at the Monarch School. She demonstrated and switched up the music.

“I want you to improvise two things – sliding and placement sequences – and don’t forget to change levels,” she said. “Press into other body parts, and I want you end with something risky.”

Several dancers obliged by pressing a hand into their chin, just as Wallace did. The endings were more spontaneous, marked by wild leaps and flips, screams and shouts. A man peeled off his shirt to reveal sculpted muscles, which drew cheers and applause.

There was no shortage of adrenaline inside the small space. Decked out in every conceivable variation of work out wear, attentive men and women watched each choreographer and struggled to avoid collisions.

“I’ll show you eight counts,” said Kyle Sorensen, “and I want you to find ease in your joints. Think of seaweed in the ocean. I’m invested in eyes moving around. Find an image that works for you.”

To kick off 2013’s Trolley Dances, Sorensen chose the front entrance outside of downtown’s new Central Library, which opens on Sept. 28.

Now in its 15<sup>th</sup> year, performing in Trolley Dances is almost a rite of passage for local dancers. Without surprise, the open audition drew a striking range of people: novices, professionals, tweens, middle-aged, tiny, tall, tattooed, and bun-headed. Many were familiar members of dance companies. There was a doctor, neuroscientist, and chemist or two. Two hearing-impaired women watched with keen attention, and took cues from a sign language interpreter.

Sorensen’s sequence began with heavy legs stumbling forward and hands limp, then splayed stiff.



Kyle Sorensen leads dancers at the open audition for Trolley Dances. He is one of five choreographers to present site-specific work during the event. Photo: Kris Eitland

“Dante, help separate the group into two,” Sorensen asked a very tall man, “and everyone, let the elbow pull you. Use your bones more than muscles. Float and dive.”

A soft-spoken Khamla Sompahn taught a phrase that began with cupping the air and ended with rebounds off the floor.

“I want you to find that moment,” she said with a raised hand. “Let it digest in the body, shift into the hip, isolating the ribcage before you travel.”

The very animated Blythe Barton led the warm up and also taught Isaacs’ sections.

“Spiral up from the floor and suck it all up into coupe,” she said, “and chop-chop, hip spiral, turn that inside out, run 2-3-4 – a one and a half spin, hands clasped behind, chop suey around the head, go to leg, into second, then hip thrust, then squirrel arms fast coil up and down.”

Many dancers struggled to keep up with the lightning fast pace. A few grasped the sequence in minutes.

Isaacs was quick to reassure the group, and suggest more technique classes and auditions. Looking like spent marathon runners, the hopeful bunch waited in the halls outside Isaac’s studio at Dance Place, adjacent to the theater. After a long huddle, the choreographers called out numbers and first names.

“I’m sorry it took so long,” shouted Isaacs. “This was the biggest turnout ever. A lot of our choices had to do with scheduling, so be proud and please come out and support these dancers.”

Along with Isaacs, Wallace, Sorensen, and Sompanh, who ran this audition, Kim Epifano, a choreographer from San Francisco, will also set work for Trolley Dances. Through the audition, they hired about 50 dancers. Each will earn a \$300 stipend.



Zahna Moss, #59, was a standout during the audition and will perform in Trolley Dances. Photo credit: George Willis

First called was number 59, Zahna Moss, one of the hearing impaired dancers. “I have a degree in dance and chemistry,” she said, “and I work in pharmaceuticals, but I love dance so much. I take in the rhythm visually.”

You can catch Moss and the rest of the dancers at Trolley Dances, along the tracks downtown over two weekends, Sept. 27-29, and Oct. 5-6, 2013. For more information, visit <http://www.sandiegodancetheater.org/trolleydances2013.html>