



SHAMEL PITTS

Black Velvet: Architectures and Archetypes

WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY,
APRIL 24 & 25, 7:30 PM
CURRENT ARTSPACE
+ STUDIO

**PRESENTED TOGETHER
IN ONE EVENING
WITH BOBBI JENE SMITH'S
A STUDY ON EFFORT**

ARTIST STATEMENT

The texture of a body's architecture
The stature of a statue
The posture of too high standing pillars
Too tall to hold
Buildings Built On Buildings
Too Bold To Console
As Bold As Blood

THE MUSIC ROARS disturbingly loud, white noise drumming on furiously. Two ever-so-graceful bodies glide on stage, the feeble light slowly focusing on their muscular forms as they push and strive, embrace and break apart. Their shorn heads and similar build make it almost impossible to discern between the pair of dancers. Are they female or male? Are they fighting or making love? Are they winning or losing? Does it even matter? This ambiguous, magical duo who enjoy both provoking and moving their audiences to tears are artists Shamel Pitts and Mirelle Martins." (*Timeout Israel*).

The winner of a 2017 Stockholm Fringe award, *Black Velvet* officially

premiered in São Paulo in 2018 and has been performed in New York City, Atlanta, Vienna, Singapore, and other cities. A partnership between performance artist, dancer, spoken word artist, and teacher Shamel Pitts and Brazilian performance artist and independent art producer Mirelle Martins, *Black Velvet* is an original multidisciplinary performance art work created in São Paulo, Brazil.

A celebration of the many textures, beauty, delicacy, and power within us, *Black Velvet* is an art piece that aims to share and reflect on the colorfulness of blackness—especially in regards to black women—in a relationship of love, compassion, and camaraderie. About this work, Pitts has remarked that by dealing

within structures of systems, we can discover what is inside of us, between us and around us; to bridge the distances so that we can see and meet each other. Some systems must be broken and reimaged, in order to reconstruct and reveal what is otherwise hidden.

Shamel Pitts began his dance training at LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts and at The Ailey School. Shamel earned his BFA in Dance from The Juilliard School and began his professional dance career with BJM_Danse Montreal and Mikhail Baryshnikov's Hell's Kitchen Dance. He continued his career with Batsheva Dance Company for seven years and is a teacher of Gaga, the movement language created by Ohad Naharin. Shamel

has been on faculty for Movement Invention Project, Springboard Danse Montréal under the direction of Alexandra Wells, and teaches at Harvard University and The Juilliard School. He also performs with Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar's L-E-V Dance Company, and is staging Ohad Naharin's repertory on many companies around the world. In 2018, Shamel received a 2018 Princess Grace Award in Choreography.

Mirelle Martins is a Brazilian performance artist and independent art producer, who began researching dance and performance in 2013. Since 2015, she has been a producer and translator of Gaga, the movement language created by Ohad Naharin. In 2016, Mirelle started a creative partnership

with Shamel Pitts. Since then, she has had residencies with Sidra Bell Dance New York and DOCK 11 in Berlin, where she and Pitts worked on *Black Velvet*. Mirelle is currently touring *Black Velvet* with Pitts internationally, and also performs in his newest work, *Black Hole*. ■

CREDITS

CREATION AND PERFORMANCE

Shamel Pitts and Mirelle Martins

CHOREOGRAPHY Shamel Pitts

LIGHT AND VIDEO MAPPING

Lucca Del Carlo

COLLABORATIVE LIGHTING

ARTIST Tom Love

COSTUME DESIGNER David Gap

PHOTOS AND VIDEOS Mauricio

Pisani, Alex Apt, Wilian Aguiar,

Rebecca Stelle, Itai Zwecker

AUDIO Tentáculo Áudio (Ed Côrtes)

GRAPHIC DESIGN Idan Epshtein

BOBBI JENE SMITH

A Study on Effort

ARTIST STATEMENT

The effort of lifting
The effort of missing
The effort of surrender
The effort of not knowing
The effort of listening
The effort of pleasure
The effort of taking care

CHOREOGRAPHY AND PERFORMANCE

Bobbi Jene Smith

COMPOSITION AND PERFORMANCE

Keir GoGwilt

A STUDY ON EFFORT explores connections between sound, body, and duration. An hour-long dialogue between dancer Bobbi Jene Smith and violinist Keir GoGwilt, the piece transposes different physical and emotional tasksmusic and movement in "...chilling, thrilling rawness" (*New York Times*). The efforts are supported and transformed in the exchange between gesture and sound, finding pleasure at the boundaries of the two artistic disciplines.

Originally conceived by Bobbi Jene Smith in 2014, *A Study on Effort* has evolved from a six-minute dance piece into this hourlong collaboration featuring seven "studies on effort" that has been called an "intimate meditation of feminine strength and sexuality." The original piece was performed at Studio Varda, San Francisco Conservatory of Dance, Gibney Dance, and the Israel Museum. In 2016, Bobbi Jene and Keir GoGwilt collaborated on a new version, which was performed to critical acclaim at the Luminato Festival, PS 122's COIL Festival, the



ODC Theater, and the American Repertory Theater. Described as a “hauntingly intimate piece that packs an emotional punch” (*New York Theatre Review*), it was named one of Toronto’s top five dance performances of 2016 (*The Toronto Globe and Mail*).

Bobbi Jene Smith was born in Centerville, Iowa and is an alumnus of the Juilliard School, North Carolina School of the Arts, and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School. From 2005-2014, Bobbi was a member of the Batsheva Dance Company under the artistic direction of Ohad Naharin. Her choreography and solo work has been presented by the Batsheva

Dance Company, The Israel Museum, Luminato Festival, Machol Shalem, The San Francisco Conservatory of Dance, NYU, and The Juilliard School. Bobbi is the subject of *Bobbi Jene*, the 2017 documentary directed by Elvira Lind. Her film and video work include *Annihilation*, directed by Alex Garland, *MA*, directed by Celia Rowilson-Hall, and *Yossi*, directed by Eytan Fox. Bobbi is a certified Gaga teacher and has taught Ohad Naharin’s repertory in schools and universities around the world.

Keir GoGwilt, violinist, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and graduated from Harvard University

with high honors, after which he was awarded the Louis Sudler Prize in the Arts. He has performed as a soloist around the world with such groups as the Chinese National Symphony, the Orquesta Filarmonica de Santiago, and the Manhattan School of Music Chamber Sinfonia. As a recitalist and chamber musician, he has played at festivals including the Luminato Festival, the Spoleto Festival in Italy, and Rockport Chamber Music. Keir has worked closely with a number of composers including Roger Reynolds, Tan Dun, Tobias Picker, and Matthew Aucoin, and is also active as a poet, scholar, and improviser. ■