



# Planting Seeds

DELIRIOUS Dances, in Weeks' (pictured at rear and below) *Three Rites, Happiness*

Edisa Weeks draws from a broad range of dance interests to inspire a diverse student body. **BY KATHRYN HOLMES**

**A**sk Edisa Weeks what shaped her into the artist and educator she is today, and she will list an eclectic array of mentors, collaborators and inspirations. From her teen years as a member of Marie Brooks' Brooklyn-based Pan-Caribbean Dance Company, studying African and Caribbean dance styles as well as basic modern technique, to her professional career performing with DanceBrazil, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Jane Comfort and Company and others, Weeks has leapt at almost every opportunity in her path.

These days, in addition to directing her own company, DELIRIOUS Dances, Weeks is on faculty at Queens College in Queens, New York—demographically the most diverse county in the country. Weeks' diverse personal experiences give her myriad ways to connect with her pupils. "I have such a broad range of students," she says, explaining that in the same classroom, she might

have people from Pakistan, Korea, China, Nigeria, Russia, Armenia, South America and beyond, as well as a variety of ages and skill levels. "So, my goal is to create a broad spectrum of dance artists, dancemakers, thinkers and appreciators. I look at my job as planting seeds."

Since landing a position at Queens College's Department of Drama, Theatre & Dance eight years ago, Weeks has been teaching modern, composition and several other courses, including a pedagogy class for aspiring dance teachers and a workshop that brings together dancers and choreographers with actors and directors to talk about crossover between the two artforms. She also mentors student choreographers and coordinates workshops with visiting artists through the CUNY (City University of New York) Dance Initiative.

She constantly finds ways to connect her work as an educator with her own artistic endeavors. For instance, while



leading the mixed dance/drama workshop, Weeks reexamined how she integrates theatrical elements such as text and environment into her choreography. "That class was a chance for me to ask myself, 'How do I embody what I'm teaching?'" she says.

## On Becoming an Educator

As a freshman at Brown University—not planning to dance—Weeks had a chance encounter with Paula Franklin that led to her joining Fusion, the student-run dance company that Franklin had founded. "I was very raw," Weeks says. "I had a lot of passion, but not a lot of technique."

Photo by Julie Lemberger; inset by George Larkins; both courtesy of Weeks



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To Begin the World Over Again, by Weeks and composer Joseph Phillips. Includes 13 musicians and singers.

The group embraced a variety of styles: jazz, liturgical, hip hop, tap and modern. “But I still needed more technical training,” she says.

Once she’d graduated from Brown University, completing an independent study in Non-Western Performance Studies, she enrolled in the certificate program at The Ailey School in New York. Although she wasn’t able to finish that two-year program, due to a knee injury, Weeks still got what she needed from her time at Ailey. In addition to taking plenty of ballet, she studied Graham, Horton and Dunham modern techniques, strengthening the foundation she felt she’d lacked.

Her first official faculty position was at Bard College in 2001; she came in as a substitute and then taught modern for two semesters as an adjunct. She went on to get her master’s degree from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, where she was an Alberto Vilar Performing Arts Fellow, and then spent a semester teaching at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before taking an adjunct/lecturer job at Princeton



Weeks in Three Rites, Liberty

also dovetails nicely with Queens College’s history of activism. “My formative years were spent in Uganda, Papua New Guinea and Brooklyn, where I experienced huge inequities in wealth and access to resources,” Weeks explains. “Now, a lot of my students are working-class or are from an immigrant community. Many are the first in their family to go to college. It’s often harder for these people to make it in the dance world. It’s my job to support them and provide them with opportunities.”

#### Diverse Destinations

Several Queens College alumni have gone on to perform professionally; some have formed their own troupes. However, a large number join the dance world in other arenas. “I’ve had students pursue arts administration. Many teach in K–12 schools or run community centers,” Weeks says. “A lot have gone into dance therapy, because dance was a place where they themselves found peace and joy.”

Wherever her pupils go, Weeks hopes that she’s given them the tools to fuel their dreams. “Some seeds sprout right away, while others take longer to germinate,” she says. “Either way, it’s so exciting when you see someone take something you shared and use it to launch in a new direction. That’s what keeps me going.” **DT**

*Kathryn Holmes is a writer and dancer based in Brooklyn, New York.*



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