

Enchanted

Delirious Dances

Brooklyn Botanic Garden: Native Flora Garden

July 23 and August 13

Choreography by Edisa Weeks in collaboration with the dancers

Music composed by Katie Down

Costumes by Meghan E. Healey & Mirembe

Dancers: Angel Chinn, Joshua Dunn, Devin Oshiro, Josh Palmer

Musicians: Sam Bardfeld, Terry Dame, Matt Darriau, Katie Down, Jessica Lurie, Uri Sharlin (not all musicians performed both evenings)

Guides: Ilianna Ayala, Leora Graber, Tamika Ramsay, Jiemin Yang

The sun is still bright at 5 PM as I enter the sheltering forest, the oldest section of Brooklyn Botanic Garden's expanded Native Flora Garden. This wedge of deep woods, sliced with a small brook, is a snapshot of the woodland that once covered Brooklyn. Densely green, the filtered sun creates delicate patterns on the plants and people below. It has always been one of my favorite parts of the garden, a hidden refuge from the world outside. Tonight, (August 13,) it comes alive, and not only with small furry creatures. Inside the multi-hued green are forest sprites hidden near trees and perched on logs.

Down a winding, wood chip path, curves of log fence guide me deeper into the trees. In a small glen, a white clad being holds a magical twist of white branch, a Forest Guide. Outside the garden Jiemin Yang is a Queens College student, today he leads mortals through the sites of *Enchanted*, choreographer Edisa Weeks' and composer Katie Down's lovely, late summer idyll.

Dressed in live foliage, flowers, raffia, a small forest of twigs on a back, the sprites are distinct in shades of brown, grey and green. Each performer's solo—nestled into greenery, seated on a log, luxuriating on a bench—begins with an offering, a gift of a tiny box, taken from a larger white box, given to someone in the audience. This is one of Weeks' strengths, one of several unique aspects of her choreographic approach. Direct interaction between audience and performer is rare in performed dance. Weeks fosters a different environment. Her dancers, her sprites, hold audience member's hands as they dance in front of them. Angel Chinn gently waves her fingers, like grass, or a breeze, in front of the faces of the audience changing the light, like a magical conjuring. Devin Oshiro simply stops her legs wide in a powerful plié, torso slightly off-center. With a sharp twerk of her head she makes eye contact with each person pulling the audience in to her world.

Each sprite is different; their movement vocabularies as unique as their costumes—Joshua Dunn's long-legged reaches, Chinn's ripples through her body, Oshiro's command of space, Josh Palmer's sensuous curves and trick of disappearing into the shadows. Fluidity punctuated with sharp shoulder gestures, quick changes of direction, are common to all Weeks' work.

Using instruments of found seeds, wood and natural detritus, as well as violin and wind instruments, composer Katie Down's soundscape played on the soft breeze. Dancers and musicians, gesture and sound, sometimes one leads, sometimes the other. In the second half of the work, two group sections outside the deciduous forest, the music, still delicate but richer, more nuanced in the open spaces, sound as if the musicians are playing.

Along the edge of the Native Flora Garden's new bog is a more formal dance, perhaps a fairy's quadrille. Bidding the audience, sitting on both sides of the boardwalk, farewell, dancers hold our hands, escort us from one side to the other. We are invited to join the music with cardboard-tube shakers.

As conjured by Weeks and Down, it's easy to imagine midsummer beings, celebrating in this magical stretch of the Botanic Garden, inviting us "mere mortals" to join them. And it is not the first time The Garden has been so inhabited. In 2011 and 2012 Yanira Castro's *Paradis* brought a very different group of mid-summer residents to different parts of the garden. Let's hope new creatures appear every summer.