



IMG *Artists*

dre.dance

taye.diggs / andrew.palermo, founders
www.dredance.com



e.press.kit
2010 - 2011

founders



Childhood friends Andrew Palermo and Taye Diggs have worked together for twenty years. Natives of Rochester, NY, they are proud graduates of Rochester's School of the Arts.

In 2004, Andrew and Taye formed dre.dance, a NYC-based contemporary dance company that has quickly garnered praise from *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, and other publications, calling the young company 'powerful', 'athletic', 'gifted', 'passionate', 'propulsive', 'unexpected' and 'wonderful'. dre.dance's world premiere performance, *cold water*, was presented at The Joffrey Ballet School's 2005 gala. The company has

since presented several New York seasons, as well as performances at The Kitchen, Dance Theatre of Harlem, the New York City Festival of Dance, Dance New Amsterdam's In the Company of Men festival, Tribeca Performing Arts Center's Work and Show festival, and the Usdan Concert Series.

In addition to performance, Artistic Director Andrew Palermo conducts residencies and masterclasses in contemporary dance, musical theater, hip-hop, jazz, and acting/audition techniques. Palermo also lectures on the company's current touring work, *beyond.words*, and alongside dre.dance performers offers movement workshops to individuals on the autistic spectrum. Andrew has provided instruction and/or built new work at the University of Cincinnati-CCM, University of Michigan, Syracuse University, Pepperdine University, Wichita State University, SUNY-Potsdam, Rochester School of the Arts, Music Theater Italy, Dance New Amsterdam, Broadway Dance Center, EDGE Performing Arts Center, Millennium Dance Complex, and numerous national conventions, studios and performing arts camps.

Outside of dre.dance, Andrew's stage choreography credits include *Esther Demsack* at the Public Theater, Kristin Chenoweth at Carnegie Hall, *Great Joy* at New Amsterdam Theatre, *Journey to the West* at 37 Arts, New York City Festival of Dance featuring Idina Menzel, *ACE* at The Old Globe, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, *Bright Lights*, *Big City* at Prince Music Theatre, *Aida* at Music Theatre of Wichita, and *Man of La Mancha* at Sacramento Music Circus. For the camera, Andrew has choreographed for Tracy Ullman's "State of the Union" on Showtime and Comedy Central's "Stella", as well as commercials for G-Shock and the Showtime Network/Apple Computers.

As performers, Andrew and Taye have appeared on Broadway, Off-Broadway and in touring productions of *Carousel*, *How to Succeed in Business...*, *Rent*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *West Side Story*, *The Wild Party*, *Little Fish*, *Chicago*, *A Soldier's Play*, and *Wicked*. Additionally, Taye has numerous television credits to his name, including *Kevin Hill* (UPN), *Ally McBeal* (Fox), *Daybreak* (ABC) and can currently be seen on *Private Practice* (ABC). His feature film credits include *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, *Brown Sugar*, *Chicago*, *Rent*, and many others.

beyond.words

Called "a fascinating and truly moving portrait of autism" (Theater Online), *beyond.words* was inspired by a CNN feature about a non-verbal woman with autism, Amanda Baggs, who uses her computer to speak text that she turns into documentary videos which portray what it is like to live within her world and speak her language. This CNN story sparked an interest in Palermo to learn more about autism and related disorders.

The movement vocabulary for *beyond.words* is inspired by 'stimming' (self-stimulation, rocking and repetitive movements), patterning, and the interpretation of the battle between maelstrom and inner peace that both autistic and Asperger's individuals describe as an ongoing dialogue within themselves. Further inspiration for this vocabulary has been introduced through research gathered through video documentaries and clinical and written works, as well as through a series of workshops with autistic children at Heartspring, a worldwide center for children with special needs.



beyond.words had its world premiere at Wichita State University in September 2008, and completed a successful New York City run in April 2009, opening on World Autism Day.

In addition to its work onstage, dre.dance is committed to supporting performances of *beyond.words* with a wide variety of residency activities, including workshops with autistic youth and their families. The company recently presented at the Mind and Body in Autism conference, hosted by Teachers College at Columbia University, as well as the New York City Department of Health's kickoff event for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. dre.dance continues to explore ways to partner with national and international autism organizations such as Heartspring and Autism Speaks as dre.dance continues to develop its community work.



press.quotes

"Sustained by powerful dancing and often inventive movement. . ."
~ *The New York Times*

"Palermo and Diggs have made a fascinating and truly moving portrait of autism."
~ *TheaterOnline*

"The propulsive choreography took unexpected risks... These first pieces were genuinely fresh."
~ *The New York Sun*



beyond.words audience.response

"For 13 years, I've tried to understand my son's autism. In one night, I learned more about his feelings, his concerns, his movements, his world from dre.dance's *beyond.words*."
~ Peter Bell, Executive Vice President, Autism Speaks

"It brought us to the edge of tears...Anyone with concerns or connections to persons on the autism spectrum would be enriched by seeing this show."
~ www.takingscenicroute.com

"Through its clever and compelling choreography, *beyond.words* effectively dismantles myth-understanding with deft authenticity by portraying autism in all its mystery and beauty."
~ William Stillman, author of *Autism and the God Connection*

"So much of the focus on autism in the media is so negative and to have somebody show that there is also beauty is really refreshing...I have never been as affected by a dance before. Powerful experience."
~ elvis-sightings.blogspot.com



The New York Times

Childhood Friends Fuse Passion With Athleticism

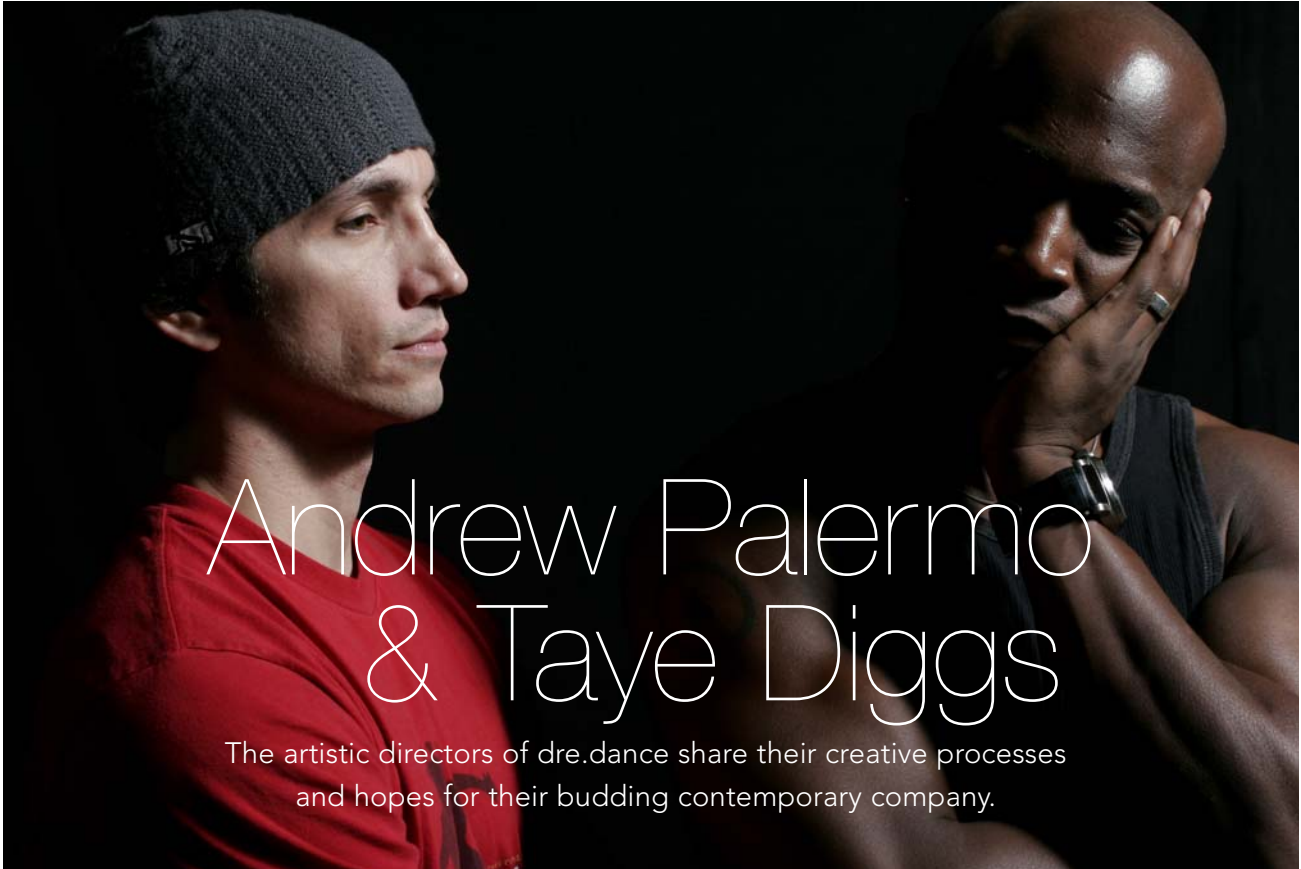
By Roslyn Sulcas
February 6, 2006

Mainstream actors don't usually dabble in dance, so it's a surprise to discover that Taye Diggs — who made his name in "Rent" and moved on to equal success on stage and in film and television — is also a choreographer. With his childhood friend Andrew Palermo (both grew up in Rochester, N.Y., where they attended the School of the Arts), Mr. Diggs has formed a company, dre.dance, which presented "pre.view" over the weekend at the Ailey Citigroup Theater.

Both men are credited with "concept and choreography" for the first part of the program, "pre" — a melodramatic dance about a love triangle set to music by Michael John La Chiusa, played live by an excellent quartet. The segmented story is shown in reverse, like Harold Pinter's "Betrayal," so that it begins with a suicide (or at least a dramatic fall from a ladder) and ends with a blissfully embracing couple. This reversed narrative would be hard to grasp without program notes, but although the piece feels too long and the music is often treacly, it's sustained by powerful dancing and often inventive movement. On Saturday night, Karen More, Jennifer Parsinen and Tiger Martina were all impressive as the tortured lovers — particularly Ms. More, strikingly intense in an opening solo of convulsive kicks, lashing arms and straight-legged jumps.

A surrounding Greek chorus of three women (Rachel Bress, Chesare Hardy and Shanna Vanderwerker) provided a more abstract counterpoint, their slow swooping, wheeling movements juxtaposed with forcefully energetic yet truncated gestures. This combination of high energy, deliberate athletic gesture (loping runs, starter-block positions, ice-skating spins) and checked power seems to be the choreographers' signature style, and it held up remarkably well in the better second half, called "view." It seamlessly blended five pieces (the first three by Mr. Palermo, the last two by Mr. Diggs), visually unified by variations on red-and-black costumes and a nuanced lighting design by Kevin J. Greene. Particularly notable were Mr. Palermo's weird and wonderful "Uncle Gary" — a tour de force solo for Mr. Martina — and "Seen Study," a slow, beautifully patterned female quartet by Mr. Diggs that suggested he has every right to be taken seriously in his new venture.





Topher Cox

Andrew Palermo & Taye Diggs

The artistic directors of dre.dance share their creative processes and hopes for their budding contemporary company.

Nearly 20 years ago, two young boys formed an instant bond after meeting in dance class in their native Rochester, New York. It was a connection that would lay the groundwork for the future establishment of their own 12-member company.

Today, Andrew Palermo and Taye Diggs' New York-based dre.dance is entering its fourth season and creating quite a name within the performing arts community. The press has praised their work as "powerful," "unexpected," "athletic," "passionate" and "abstract," and the company recently signed its first tour (set to begin in 2009) with booking powerhouse IMG Artists, which also represents such companies as Paul Taylor Dance Company and Pilobolus.

After graduating from Rochester's School of the Arts, the childhood friends remained close while continuing their musical theater education in different parts of the country: Diggs attended Syracuse University and Palermo went to the University of Cincinnati. Both

trained under such renowned teachers as Garth Fagan, Timothy Draper, Milton Myers and original Alvin Ailey member James Truitte.

Diggs decided to embark upon an acting career post-college, which led to starring roles as an original cast member of the Tony Award-winning musical and feature film *Rent*, motion picture *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* and, currently, ABC's "Private Practice." Meanwhile, Palermo chose to establish himself as a stage and commercial choreographer, teacher and Broadway performer, starring as one of the primary ensemble members of the box-office hits *Wicked* and *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Although content with his acting career, Diggs felt the tug of dance whenever he would chat with Palermo about his teaching gigs. The two rejoined to instruct master classes at several well-known studios, and in 2004, approached Dancers Responding to AIDS about showcasing their first benefit performance. The duo christened their fledgling company dre.dance, a combination of

their names.

Palermo and Diggs recently completed a residency at Wichita State University in Kansas, where they set the first 20 minutes of their Joyce SoHo residency work-in-progress *beyond.words* on the performing arts students. The piece, which delves into embracing life with autism, will premiere April 2009 at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center as a full-length work. The company is also rehearsing a sociopolitical piece titled *the people*, which will feature a live orchestra and cutting-edge visual effects, to be presented at TPAC this month.

Dance Teacher: What drives you to create?

Andrew Palermo: I began dance at such a young age that I downplayed it because I was acting and singing, too. Then, as I started choreographing later I realized that it was something built within me. I feel I have something to say, whether it's through choreography or teaching, and that's just how I am made.

Dance is the purest expression there is and maybe the oldest—dance and song are universal. Something we are doing now could've been seen and understood 2,000 years ago, and that's pretty cool.

Taye Diggs: The need to create just comes from this raw relationship that I have with music. I don't know why it chose me, but when I hear music I just want to move. And the way I feel when I move is unlike any other feeling that I have experienced. It's something that I don't even understand, but I'm very grateful for it. It allows me to focus and better direct all this energy that I have.

DT: What has influenced your style?

AP: We both love Jerome Robbins—he's a perfect mixture of technical ability, athleticism and everyday movement; we're big fans of pedestrian movement. Marty Kudelka, Wade Robson and Ohad Naharin are also big influences. Then again, there are a million different people out there who inspire us on a daily basis. We both grew up playing a lot of sports while dancing, so incorporating athletic movement is a big part of it. Our dancers, both men and women, have to be like brick houses. They have to be really strong; we don't change things up for the girls.

TD: There was always music playing in my house, so I feel like I owe my love of dance in its rawest form to my parents. We grew up dancing to the Jackson 5 and Earth, Wind and Fire. We'd have Saturday morning family sessions where we'd dance until the record skipped. Also, the resident modern dance company in Rochester was Garth Fagan Dance, and it was the first time I was exposed to this style of modern. It really caught my attention because it was a predominantly black modern dance company. It was something so distant from what I was used to seeing onstage. There were these big muscular men doing strong and dynamic athletic movements. Today the movement I'm still drawn to when I choreograph is very similar—staccato, jumps and

changes of direction. I just want to make sure that I'm constantly stimulated by the movement.

DT: What is your creative process, and is collaborating long distance due to Diggs' Los Angeles-based filming schedule challenging?

AP: Normally, I'll start with the music and get my inspiration from there, but each piece is different. Lately I'm of the "anything goes" school—the less you limit yourself, the more open you are to interesting possibilities. The key is to challenge the dancers and myself by making each piece unique and changing up the creative process.

Because of other things we have going on, we are not a full-time 9-to-5 company, and to keep that focus is a challenge. It can be hectic for me sometimes to keep things running while teaching, but at the same time, I think that this split focus can be put to good use through stepping away from something and coming back. Just the other day I came from a play rehearsal back to working on *the people* and my steps were all showbiz-y, having been influenced by what I was doing earlier.

TD: It's obviously best when we're both in the same city and can vibe off of each other. It is difficult when we're worlds apart, so we've had to try out

different configurations. We divide the movements into eighths, take on full segments, trade off as we go along or choreograph entire pieces separately. It's a lot of telephone calls and coming up with interesting new ways to collaborate. I'll find dancers on the West Coast, put them on video and e-mail that to Drew. He has been e-mailing me the current rehearsal process and I'm able to view what he's been working on up to this point. It's our own style and I think it adds to the quirkiness of *dre.dance*. We are forced to take what we've been given and benefit from it, knowing that whatever comes out is going to be really interesting. Were it any other situation, we would be choreographing completely differently and might miss out on an interesting outcome. Embracing that fact is going to result in a true creation.

DT: How did you react when watching your first piece together?

AP: Mine was a feeling of sheer terror. But it made me notice that my attachment to *dre.dance* is at a whole other level than any other work I choreograph because it's 100 percent us. If we stopped it would stop, and that really brings a lot of responsibility and pride with it, and huge self-criticism at the same time—it's a blessing and a curse, I guess. Like at the DRA event, Taye and



Ron Todorowski and Tiger Martina in *dre.dance's fall*

Steven Schreiber

FACE TO FACE

I were sitting in the back and I was freaking out about technical mishaps like lighting cues, not the choreography.

TD: We're both pretty cool, calm and collected and have great senses of humor, so I had never seen him in that state before; he was just beside himself. We were brand-new choreographers at the time and it demonstrated to me how important and how real this is to him.

DT: What do you hope to instill within your company as well as your audience?

AP: I stress repeatedly, in this day and age of tricks and dancers wanting to be on "So You Think You Can Dance" and all those shows, that dance is an art and we can't forget that. It's about expression and acting. We always tell our students that you have to be actors first; you have to be able to tell a story or at least evoke something partially through your body and storytelling abilities. But it's something that I often forget until opening night since I'm always in the studio crafting what I want to say until that moment. I strive to challenge our dancers to stretch themselves, to look at things from a different angle rather than react to their first instinct—to think beyond normality.

TD: Selfishly, I want everyone to enjoy it. I want to create works with Drew that people will love and will be moved by. From there we can get more specific; if there's a message we're trying to convey, or an issue we want to bring a certain amount of awareness to, that's always great. That insecure performer in me wants to be liked, which can get difficult when you're artistic-directing. We'll ask the opinions of our dancers and sometimes we'll take what they offer, but I have to check myself because I don't want to be swayed too much. You have to stick to your own vision. I have to remind the dancers that it's not just about movement; you have to make a connection.

DT: You select serious topics for your works. Why and how do you approach



Steven Schreiber

these issues, and is this something you will continue to do?

AP: It's a bit ironic, I guess, because up until *beyond.words*, every piece had its own story; they were driven by what we were feeling at that moment. While our pieces sometimes touch on serious topics, we do have those that are fun, and even if you're not a concert dance lover, you can still come to a dre.dance evening and find things you're going to like. I can't imagine us abandoning this as it's who we are. We tend to go with what we feel at the moment for the movement, dance and subject matter, so I don't think there's any way to know what will come next.

TD: This is a direction we just started to move into. It has a lot to do with where we are politically in the world, and us just getting older and being inspired by other choreographers and artists. You start to feel a bit of responsibility and want to have a say and be heard, but I can't imagine we would ever turn into a political dance company. These are just two pieces as a result of us experimenting down a new path.

DT: What role do you feel such thought-provoking subjects play within the dance world?

AP: When working on a piece, dancers are not really thinking about the topic because they're doing the movement and interpreting what we're giving them. But when it comes to talking about it, we've had dancers tell us that the pieces raised their own awareness—it opened their

eyes. To me, being able to affect those people who are working on a piece and performing it is the highest compliment.

TD: As choreographers, we have certain ideas we want to get out there and put across so you can remind people what's going on in the world. It seems to be changing recently with how much mainstream attention the dance world is receiving, which I think is wonderful. But society doesn't look to dance as a place to find political views and ideas, so it's great that choreographers are choosing that venue to express themselves and to try to get people to wake up. Plus, it broadens our own horizons and stretches our limits. I know I learned something new every day while Andrew was doing research for the autism piece.

DT: What are your future goals for yourselves and for dre.dance?

AP: I ask myself this every day. We want to work on every plane. We want to have the company tour the world and we want to choreograph on Broadway, but having a proven track record is something we're still working toward. We really feel like we're on the threshold of breaking out; we're already starting to book a tour for next year and that is the real deal to me—the beginning of a new, exciting phase.

TD: Getting a couple of grants would be a good start, but we want to do it all. We think we have great, interesting ideas. We'd love to steer the company, of course, and work on all these different levels at the same time. **DT**

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