

Past Featured Artists

-  February 2010 **WeildWorks**
-  January 2010 **The Neo-Futurists**
-  December 2009 **Company XIV**
-  September 2009 **COBU**
-  August 2009 **AMORALISTS**

FEATURED ARTIST

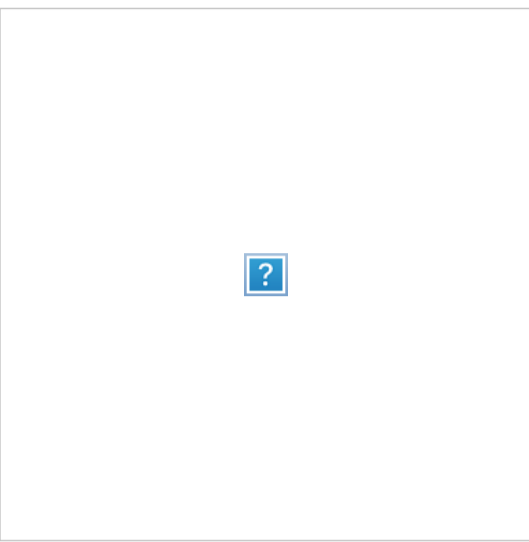
For the month of FEBRUARY

WeildWorks

A Theasy Interview with Artistic Director Kim Weild

by Jessica Pohly

I recently met with Kim Weild of WeildWorks to discuss her upcoming production of Chuck Mee's *Fêtes de la Nuit*. We sat down in a stunning, cavernous hallway of the Park Avenue Armory where rehearsals were in progress. Weild's current connection with the Armory dates back to the same time she began working on *Fêtes*. It was her thesis project as a graduate student of directing at Columbia University and, as fate would have it, a man named Jamie Forshaw was in the 2007 audience to see it. He liked what he saw, connected with Weild and for the last three years the two have been growing a friendship and seeking a road back to *Fêtes*.



As a former dancer, Weild says she has existed in a world where artists are constantly returning to work as that is an accepted practice and part of what dance is about. However as a theater director she is aware that the opportunity to 'return' to a piece is a rarity. Therefore, to revisit *Fêtes* became a goal and is now a gift. Forshaw, now Production Manager at the Armory, suggested that Weild apply to be the Armory's artist in residence. She was accepted.

The Armory is far from a traditional rehearsal space with its vast, coffered ceilings and dark mahogany everything...but then, *Fêtes* is far from your average piece of theater, so it's fitting. The grandeur of the Armory matches the air of this production: large in scope and breathtaking in all the history and artistry it inspires and is inspired by. *Fêtes* is a Wunderkammer of people, places and identities. It is, Weild says "a love letter to Paris through a uniquely American lens." During our conversation Weild referred to the piece as "impressionistic;" as if being told by a flâneur (the French word for an urban stroller; one who sees and engages at the same time). Like a flâneur on a stroll through town, *Fêtes* seeks to give us a total experience of the city, simultaneously layering closeups and wide shots. Weild cites Pina Bausch as an inspiration in the way she layered energies and activities on stage.

Also appropriate to the piece is the space it will be moving into shortly: the Ohio Theater. When asked 'why the Ohio?' Weild made clear that, for one thing, it has a long, important history of enabling artists to *investigate* work rather than just *produce*. Indeed this is more of a European approach to theater: focusing on process rather than product, letting a piece and its performers incubate for longer than the usual, speedy New York rehearsal process. "With *Fêtes* we are investigating something," Weild says. And indeed this investigation dates back way beyond December rehearsals. For Weild it has been an investigation spanning much of her lifetime. She attributes inspiration to her first visit to Paris at age 14. The city served as a sort of artistic/aesthetic Pandora's box for Weild while she studied ballet there.

She officially landed in *Fêtes* territory when, in choosing a piece for her thesis, mentor Anne Bogart asked Weild if she thought *Fêtes* would be 'fun' to do. While 'fun' struck her as an odd descriptor she knew that indeed the 'fun' anticipated in directing it, coupled with her total fear of the piece was exactly the right blend of energy she needed. Indeed, Bogart famously encourages artists to go toward their fears and to tackle the projects that most terrify and mystify them...and yes, apparently the ones that will be 'fun' too.

After her meeting with Bogart, Weild went to Chuck Mee's home in Brooklyn to ask permission to work on the piece. It hadn't yet been produced in New York. Nervously she asked him in his kitchen. To her delight he was "ecstatic" about the idea and she was "surprised, humbled and thrilled and really, really scared." Mee was in attendance for the final thesis production. He was impressed by Weild's vision for the piece and thus began their collaboration.

Dance was a huge part of Weild's early training as a performer and certainly permeates her theatrical vision today. She claims she is still trying to figure out how to navigate the theater-dance dialogue for this piece. She has performers who don't dance at all and ones who are only dancers. For the first three weeks of rehearsal an hour each day was devoted to tango lessons. Not everyone is dancing in the show but she felt it was essential for performers to have a common understanding of tango and a common physical language to work with.

Dance has also been an important part of her direction with regards to "flow." For example she does not believe in blackouts unless absolutely necessary. Therefore transitions become as important to the piece as anything else. Further inspired by Bausch, Weild gave actors and dancers alike a series of background questions to build their characters. "They did a lot of homework and came in bubbling," she says. This is an ensemble piece in the truest sense. Weild has garnered the energy of her performers, in all their individual glory, to create and shape a world of truthful experience on stage.

The ensemble has grown since the thesis production as Weild has added characters over the last three years. Deaf characters Sophie and Pierre are an example of this and her incorporation of sign language into the piece is a captivating choice. Weild would like to make it clear though that the piece is not deaf theater but rather about an urban experience which, quite simply, includes all sorts of people. Deafness is part of our world, she says. From an aesthetic point of view she has also been struck by the way our bodies change when we sign, watch others sign or are simply in the presence of deaf persons.

Fêtes de la Nuit is the inaugural production of WeildWorks — a company Weild has been dreaming of forming for a while. She is interested in the idea of 'company' and how a group can be used to further cross cultural exchange and collaboration. But the idea of building a company is not one she takes lightly. As Artistic Director she feels a responsibility to her performers to provide them with adequate time and space to work and, as she says, in New York "that's hard to come by." It is also important to her to know what her company members are interested in creating. All of this is integral to her belief in a strong ensemble and explains why having a 'company' per se, is a responsibility she takes quite seriously and is approaching with patience, sincerity and dedication.

WeildWorks will charge forward after *Fêtes de la Nuit* as they have already been approached with proposals for future projects. With their hearts in the right place and sensibilities that inspire, this is a company to watch out for. If New York theater tends to lack passion and integrity at times, WeildWorks certainly has the potential to re-infuse our beloved theater scene with a good dose of both. This time though it will be via Paris.

Weild believes that many artists have a line of questioning or a thread of inspiration that is subconsciously (or consciously) woven throughout their life's work. For her it is the question 'what is love?' I inquired about this. After a long pause, Weild spoke, saying that giving and receiving love is how she knows she's alive: "it's what makes us human." She calls herself a "die hard romantic" and admits that, while it has caused her great pain at times it has also buoyed her sense of joy at other times and has given rise to a deep compassion for and interest in the human condition. I was struck by her searing honesty and brazen vulnerability as she spoke about love and art in tandem. Her convictions are contagious and inspiring and leave no question as to why the performers of this show are all so thrilled to be in the room with her. I look forward to seeing such honesty and passion on the stage at the Ohio Theater in *Fêtes de la Nuit* this February. I hope you'll join me.

Photo of Kim Weild by Peter Konerko.

 **@TheatreIsEasy** on Twitter

@classicstage's FRANKENSTEIN, told from the creature's point of view, asks "Who is the real monster?" Review:... <https://t.co/8mFLT2p7fa>

In the excellent CAMBODIAN ROCK BAND at @SignatureTheatr, the modern-day trial of one man who was "only following o... <https://t.co/xUEF4kAhtG>

In BLOCKBUSTER GUY at this year's @FRIGIDNewYork festival, Mark Levy is your guide to that vanished part of America... <https://t.co/Bdy2yRqgFS>

In @classicstage's DRACULA, Kate Hamill's feminist adaptation of the Gothic classic gives a voice to put-upon wives... <https://t.co/cM8jr37Dtb>

Subscribe to our mailing list

Email
* required

First Name

Last Name