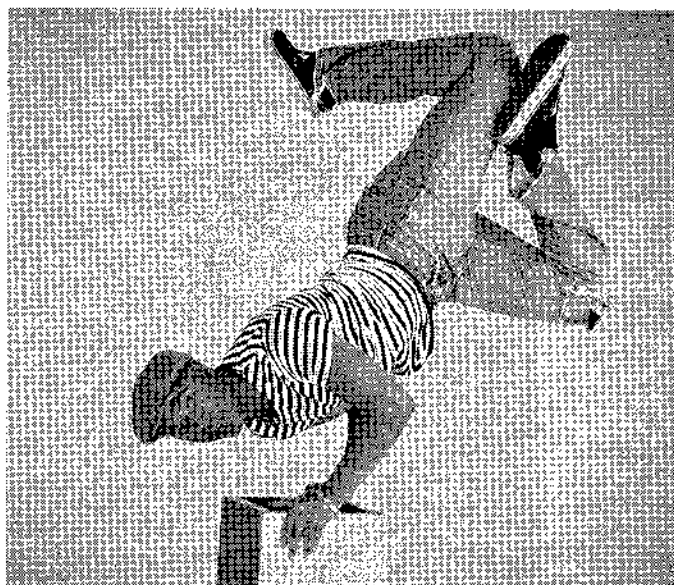


# Periorm



Rob Kunkle / Goodtux

Ben Gibbs is a performer in "Collaboration!," which is in its third year at the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason.

## HAPPY PAIRINGS

:: 'Collaboration!' :: Choreographers paired with musicians add up to synergistic success

When Lorien Fenton launched "Collaboration!" (then called the 21st Century Dance and Music Festival) in 1998, she knew it would be somewhat of a tough sell, but she was committed to the idea of pairing disparate choreographers and composers and seeing what they could create. Most had never worked together. In the true spirit of collaboration, the musicians typically play onstage with the dancers and often are integrated into the performance.

"We've been the ugly stepsisters of the dance and the music world," she notes, adding that as an additional hardship, the artists have to provide their own funding and practice spaces for the pieces. "It seems that people are finally getting it."

In its third season at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater, its ninth overall, "Collaboration!" has attracted an array of musicians and performance outfits. This year, organizers received approximately 35 proposals from choreographers for the dozen or so spaces on the bill.

After the jury selects the winning proposals, Fenton and a few others begin matching musicians to the dancers. "What happens is that when the choreographers submit a proposal of their concept, they define or suggest the type of music they would like to work with," Fenton says, "like, they say, 'I'd love to work with just piano or the cello or French jazz that's haunting or cabaret! We have between 20 and 25 musicians and composers who play very different styles that we call on. Many are classically trained but shoot off into rock or jazz.'"

While Fenton tries to accommodate the chore-

ographers' desires, she also wants to see them stretch past their comfort zones. Some of the most fruitful collaborations, she says, have come from unlikely pairings.

"Jamie Ray Wright and George Tingley, for instance, were paired last year. George is a piano player — he actually wrote the piece for figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi, the piece she skated to when she won the gold medal — but Jamie wasn't sure that he wanted piano for his piece.

"Well, George can play everything, so they ended up with an Argentine tango beat built into the piano piece with the salsa rhythm that was used in a ballet performance."

Perhaps the biggest sign that this experiment in performance programming is a success is the rate at which randomly paired performers work together again. Fenton estimates that roughly a third go on to pitch pieces to other events. Tingley and Wright, for instance, asked to work together in this year's "Collaboration!" as a result of last year's project.

"The musicians and choreographers work all summer," she says, "and the culmination of their work is always new, fresh and cool!"

—Reyhan Harmanci,  
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8 p.m. Fri.-Sat. and 2 p.m. Sun. \$17 advance, \$20 door. Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, S.F. (415) 345-7575. [www.collaborationdancemusic.org](http://www.collaborationdancemusic.org).