

A Note from the Artistic Director:

Welcome to *Chant Dances*, an evening of contemporary dance rooted in a traditional southern Italian dance called la *Pizzica Scherma*. I first began researching southern Italian traditions, dances, and folklore in 1997 when I became frustrated by the limiting stereotypes of Italian-Americans popularized by the American film industry. Tonight's concert, inspired by this research, is based on chants of work and praise from Southern Italy, and depicts a space where the fusion of ethnic tradition and contemporary dance creates global resonance.

My first interactions with chanting were actually not in Italian but in Sanskrit. Common to chanting in both these languages, however, is the powerful healing and quieting of the restless mind. In my travels I have witnessed the elation chanting can bring as it seeps below the superficial layers of worry, panic and fear and creates space for people to become relieved and ecstatic. Of particular interest for *Chant Dances* are the many chants of Southern Italy that have, over the centuries, alleviated the suffering and hardships of an agricultural and impoverished southern Italian life.

As chanting can bring joy and ecstasy to people, the journey to this relief can be difficult. It sometimes takes the courage of a brave warrior to face such difficulty. These warriors are not necessarily warriors of killing, but instead warriors of brave openness willing to fight for innocence and peace. *Chant Dances* uses a traditional southern Italian gypsy sword dance from Puglia, the *Pizzica Scherma*, as a movement frame from which to personify these warriors. This dance was taught to me by three gypsy men in the basement of a castle in Corigliano d'Otranto in August 2003. In this dance, two fingers extend from the right hand represent the sword and the left arm is used as the shield.

In these past months, fusing this powerful sword dance with these ancient chants of work and praise pushed me against the edge of my comfort zone. The question I continue to ask is how do we become our own warriors and have the courage to go into the fire and face our images of suffering, loneliness, panic and fear to bring forth the joyous relief and freedom on the other side? How can we learn from the greatest warriors of our time, like Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Gandhi, and like them have the courage to open our hearts and minds to the pure undistorted energy of greatness of being?

Thank you for joining us this evening,

Natalie Marrone
Artistic Director