

Hope Stone Dance Tells *'s (a tale of possession)* with Bird Cages, Shoe Boxes and Pink Floyd



Hope Stone Dance presents *'s (a tale of possession)* in front of a wall of 2,000 shoe boxes.

Photo by Amitava Sarkar

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It's been 15 years since a firefighter's knock roused Jane Weiner, the founder and artistic director of Hope Stone Dance, in the middle of the night. A fire next door to her Montrose townhouse forced bathrobe-clad and bleary-eyed neighbors, Weiner, her visiting parents and her dog to the street, where a fireman asked if there was anything he could save for her if her house caught fire.

"We all just looked at each other like, 'Oh God, we're all safe. Nothing else really matters at all,'" says Weiner. "That was start of it."

It is *'s (a tale of possession)*, a work created by Weiner in 2004 during a residency at DiverseWorks. Now that Weiner's revisited the piece – first for the Hobby Center's Discovery Educational Series earlier this month and now for a two-night stint at The MATCH – she's had a chance to look back on what she still considers to be "a little bit of a profound moment" that led to some important questions.

"We own all this stuff and one, where does it go after we die, and two, what does it hold," says Weiner.

Her exploration of possession and ownership found the concept deeply rooted, with Weiner

recognizing an "ownership mentality" even in herself. It is in childhood games like "Call It," in which she and her siblings would shout out the phrase to stake their claim. ("I loved horses, so if I saw horses and saw them first, I would say 'call it' meaning it was mine. Well, it wasn't mine," explains Weiner.) And it's in the way we speak.

"When I say things like, 'oh, they're my dancer,' 'they're in my company' ... I don't really own my dancer, [but] I catch [that ownership mentality] sometimes in my language," says Weiner.

Though these overarching ideas still provide the piece's overall focus, the intervening decade



Hope Stone Dance presents *'s (a tale of possession)* 15 years after its premiere.

Photo by Sonya Sellers

and a half has seen a lot of change, giving Weiner new eyes with which to see *'s (a tale of possession)*.

“[The piece is] so different with what the atmosphere is that we’re living in now,” says Weiner, citing the new political environment, the #MeToo movement, Generation Wealth, and a post-Harvey Houston. “It’s shifted, I think, to be a little bit darker.”

Weiner estimates she’s probably re-choreographed about 65 percent of the dance which, with a hip replacement scheduled for May, she ruefully admits, “I did not expect to do.”

“Physically, I needed to change some of the movement,” says Weiner. “It seemed dated to me.”

's (a tale of possession) now has less storytelling and more full-on dancing; a section extended from 11 to 18 minutes; and more gender play, with two men added since the piece’s premiere, for a total of ten – six women and four men.

“I think I used to come at it from a woman’s point of view,” says Weiner. “I don’t want to do that, I want to come at it from, what’s the sexuality of a man, not just a woman and [that] men are as sexual as women are.”

To accommodate the changes, the score, which Weiner describes as “an absolute conglomeration of music,” also got a second look.

Originally developed with Shwahn Mass and redesigned by Firat Ozsoy, the rangy score still includes the familiar beep of Kroger’s self-checkout machine – recorded years ago by Weiner, Mass, and his fuzzy mike in front of

some curious shoppers – along with minimalist composer Steve Reich, Talking Heads, Jewish folk music, Madonna, and new addition “Money” by Pink Floyd.

“The most amazing seven-count piece of music in the entire world,” adds Weiner.

Like the choreography, Weiner estimates 50 to 60 percent of the soundscape has changed in Ozsoy’s hands “because, of course, 15 years ago what we were using for music and what he’s using now is so much more advanced.”

Though the energy of the piece, the choreography and score have evolved, there is one constant.

“We still have the same shoebox wall,” says Weiner.

Just as they did 15 years ago, the dancers will

once again perform in front of a wall of approximately 2,000 shoe boxes, the collection of which Weiner describes jokingly as “a shoe box, a shoe box, my kingdom for a shoe box.”

Created by artist and Cristo Rey Jesuit art teacher David Graeve, the wall is no longer flat, as Weiner says it once was. Now, she says, Graeve has “made the wall so alive and moving and textural.”

Better yet, Graeve got an assist in constructing the wall from his seniors, who were rewarded with an opportunity to see their contributions on display during a rehearsal. And from Graeve’s students to all of the kids who saw one of the nine performances of *'s (a tale of possession)* during the Discovery series, it’s no surprise that Weiner – dedicated to creative youth development – considers the work’s themes in terms of young people.

“What’s the opposite of possession? I think it’s autonomy and freedom, and everybody’s freedom is different, but are we teaching that [to our children],” asks Weiner. “Are we teaching our children to find their autonomy?”

Weiner adds, “And if there’s good ownership, it would be ‘I own my decisions’ or ‘I own my empowerment’ or ‘I own my life to be the best that I can be.’”

Performances are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. March 28 and 29 at The MATCH, 3400 Main. For more information, call 713-521-4533 or visit hopestoneinc.org or match.org. \$25.

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Photo by Amitava Sarkar

Ten dancers with Hope Stone Dance will perform in a re-choreographed *'s (a tale of possession)*.