



*The traffic congeals as an audience gathers. From the top of the staircase, a single body descends, rolling. Soon it is joined by another, and another, until bodies are pouring down – some quickly, some melting head-torso-legs, over and over. Upon reaching the bottom, the dancer gets up and begins to climb, stepping carefully over the continually rolling bodies but ignoring the strangeness – she is on her way, direct and purposeful.*

*For choreographer Stephan Koplowitz, staircases are islands of space. Cascading from the facades of buildings like the New York Public Library and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, they provide a reveal that sets each monument apart from and above the common traffic of the street. In June, Koplowitz filled several grand steps of New York City with 50 dancers in waves of motion, evoking the poetic chaos of city life in the Grand Step Project. Dressed in business*

*casual, the bodies leapt and marched and sat staring intently out to the street, shifting from unison to group chorus to cacophony of individuals.*

*While at times 50 dancers were simultaneously doing 50 different things, the structure Koplowitz used to build the piece established a consistent style. He started with an alphabet of movements drawn from the places themselves, then organized it according to the three main activities that happen on city stairs: work, play, and contemplation. This choreographic method resembles the regulating lines of a city's urban plan, which, like the New York grid, creates a cohesive fabric from the disparate buildings that comprise it.*

*Each stair-stage is an inverted amphitheater with the audience occupying the bowl, yet having the freedom to sit, stand, or walk away. Without the encumbrance of theater doors or ticket prices, each passerby*

DANCING ON THE STEPS OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE. PHOTO: LARISSA BABIJ.

*chooses to stop and watch the vignettes of city life acted out on the stairs. Walking by those same steps the following week, they may remember the rolling bodies or the sea of arms that attracted them in the first place and sit down to watch the real action of the city happening below.*

*Watching the dancers at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine from across Amsterdam Avenue, the street traffic became part of the movement, and the crowd at the foot of the steps blended seamlessly with the performers. Framed by the proscenium of the cathedral behind, the dancers ascended this naturally raked "stage" to reveal the movement patterns of the city to its participants. And the taxis cruising up Amsterdam Avenue slowed down, as the cabbies craned their necks to see what was going on.*

– Larissa Babij