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Bold Audio Spectacles on the Lake

UWM's gift to dance students and the city

By [John Schneider \(by-author-164-1.html\)](http://by-author-164-1.html) Jun. 18, 2013



"It'll never look the same," my friend said as we left the North Point Water Tower section of UW-Milwaukee's "Summerdances—Stephan Koplowitz: Water Sight, Milwaukee," a tad stiff from sitting on the curb on last week's chilly Thursday night.

Indeed, the gothic tower and the postmodern Cudahy Gardens fronting the Calatrava addition of Milwaukee Art Museum surely were indelibly transfigured for audiences and passersby as choreographer Koplowitz and his Milwaukee collaborators staged bold audiovisual spectacles at these current and future landmarks, offering them to the senses in unexpected ways.

The UWM Department of Dance, with support from several programs including the Peck School of the Arts "Year of the Arts" celebration, commissioned the distinguished choreographer to create these works with the students. Milwaukee composers Richard Hynson and Tim Russell; the Bel Canto Chorus with soloists Erin Laabs and Rebecca Whitney; rehearsal director Christina Briggs Winslow; and designers Luc Vanier (digital projections), Lisa Christensen Quinn (costumes) and Mike Atkins (lights) contributed mightily. Koplowitz has worked prolifically in the United States and Europe. He now lives in Los Angeles, where he is dean of the California Institute of the Arts dance program.

The non-narrative, sensual choreography was firmly linked to each site's possibilities and limitations. Big, striking, courageous physicality, contrasts in speed, motifs that returned in fresh ways and mirroring that dissolved kaleidoscopically were among the more obvious strategies. In addition to wonder, the performances provoked thoughts of ancient rituals, social movements and the history and future of Milwaukee.

Etched by Atkin's low lighting, the tower looked haunted. Vanier's magical projections animated it from top to bottom with cascading water, a rising swimmer, fiery flying things and a live feed of the dancers as they emerged from, and disappeared into, shrubbery to press against the cathedral-like window and run or fall on the grassy slope. The Bel Canto Chorus cast a spell from start to finish singing a watery wordless rhapsody by Hynson.

Daytime performances at MAM set Quinn's turquoise, lavender, rose and violet costumes against the white of the building, the grey and green of the Gardens and Friday's bright blue sky. In three movements viewed from different positions and set to richly varied electronic music by Russell, 27 female dancers humanized the Gardens' formal architecture. They hung from the walls of the fountains that divide the Gardens and stood over the geysers as bubbling water rose around them at the climax.

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