

Michele Green, Suzette Sherman dance the Passionate Heart

Written By Constance Scrafield

Michele Green and Suzette Sherman think dance has the power to heal, to help with healing and to express a whole range of the emotions that can rule heads and hearts, like joy, grief, loneliness. They think dance has more to accomplish than to entertain. Dance can tell the stories of people's lives and all that entails.

'We're a travelling show,' said Ms. Sherman over coffee, where we three sat together at a local coffee shop.

Ms. Sherman meant herself and Michele Green as the two only dancers that fill the space with their intense and beautiful performance. They dance about friendship and they dance about solitude.

'It's a two-person show, six dances: four of them are duets and two are solos,' she explained. 'Whatever the audience gets out the pieces is the correct thing.'

Michele Green told us as an illustration of the value of their dance, 'In Kingston, at a church there, they replaced the service with us.'

The dance replaced the words, while still bringing meaning to the time.

This is a friendship going back forty years.

'We danced together in the '70's and then, we went our separate ways, still keeping in touch all that time,' Ms. Sherman related. 'I continued to dance for the Toronto Dance Studio, way past my best before date,' she joked. 'And I still was when we began this.'

Ms. Green co-founded the Saskatchewan Dance Theatre in the '70's until she and husband, Jim, moved to Stouffville. There she opened the DanceCentre for 20 years until she retired from teaching and went on to writing.

Once in Guelph, Ms. Sherman was teaching what she thinks 'is the easiest dance lesson to understand, built on the [Martha] Graham Technique. She was a great American modern dancer of the 1920's. She was a modern dance pioneer.'

In the early to mid 20th Century, there was the ambition of ballet dancers to bring ballet forward.

Keeping in touch with each other, Ms. Green and her family moved north to Orangeville in 2000, while Suzette Sherman was still dancing and teaching the Graham Technique with the Dance theatre David Earle. David Earle was the founder of Toronto Dance Theatre. A well-known choreographer, he choreographed three of the dances the ladies perform in their set.

They know they have the right formula for what it is they want to do.

They actually performed for the first time together in this new life of dance at the 2017 Guelph Dance Festival. It came one conversation at a time, while the idea of returning to dancing was dancing in Ms. Green's head and she was being enticed by her friend of so many years to return, so they could dance together.

'We worked almost a year for the festival,' said Ms. Sherman. 'Michele worked really hard and it was hard but she persevered. We created a duet about friendship. Once we danced for the festival, we knew we had to go on.'

Ms. Green took up the story, 'We started working on a bunch of stuff. We wanted to do something personal.'

They began their stories in dance early in 2018, with Jim Green doing the lighting and Suzette's husband taking charge of the money.

It has been pretty amazing, they told us, often the discussion is pretty enlightening. People come to us later to talk. We're making a touching moment for people it can be humbling.

Said Ms. Green, It was so gratifying when a group of teens saw our show. It meant that any age can benefit from watching our dance. As dancers, we see this as a story you can dance it your whole life.

Step outside your worlds into how you feel. What about a celebration?

It's clear we're being helpful to those who see our performance but how do we get people to come? We're dancers, not business people.

They are clear that they are happy to travel and to perform in intimate spaces. Whether a private function or open to the public, large or small, Passionate Heart fills the room with its intensity and grace as performed by these two.

Currently, they are negotiating on a space in Orangeville where they could stage productions for small gatherings of women and men; everyone loves their dance and learns so much from it. The dancing she and Ms. Green are doing, their set of dances, are interpreted by audiences, depending on your state of mind at the time.

We have performed this 14 times over the last year. This is not one only but progressive: people come back to see this again because each time they get something else from it.

We're thinking of working on another show but we wonder what sort of changes we would make. Some of it, we can't do forever, she admitted candidly.

They ruminated about it for a few seconds and Ms. Sherman commented, We're trying to show some of what we find interesting about dance. We think dance is under exposed.

Ms. Green added, Well, it's important, I feel as though we're losing touch with our emotions. We need a calm, healthy environment and the chance to experience something that's meaningful.

She remarked, quite rightly, Doctors are prescribing art, allowing people the chance to connect with their feelings and art does that. We also do a discussion at the end of our performances.

Speaking for them both, as they have clearly discussed this, Ms. Sherman opined, We need to see ourselves as people. We're all dealing with the same things. We need to be breaking down the barriers between ourselves.

They are presenting Passionate Heart at Dancetheatre David Earle, 42 Quebec Street, in Guelph this Sunday, June 9 at 2:00 p.m. For tickets or to contact them, go topassionateheartdance@gmail.com