

For Immediate Release

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NEW VISUAL ART PERFORMANCE

PERFORMA ANNOUNCES OPENING NIGHT PERFORMANCE DETAILS WITH FRANCESCO VEZZOLI AND DAVID HALLBERG ON NOVEMBER 1, 2015



New York — Performa, the internationally acclaimed organization dedicated to live performance across disciplines, announces details for their commission with Italian artist **Francesco Vezzoli** in collaboration with American classical ballet dancer **David Hallberg**, principal dancer for the Bolshoi Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, that will launch **Opening Night of Performa 15 on Sunday, November 1, 2015**.

For their Performa 15 Commission, *Fortuna Desperata*, Francesco Vezzoli and David Hallberg use the 15th Century Italian court dance as a point of departure, presented in New York City historical landmark, St. Bart's church. Based on carefully researched materials and the oldest written text on dance, *Fortuna Desperata* interprets this chronological and conceptual language to present Renaissance dance in its earliest and purist form, paying homage to a time before dance was considered a spectacle for audiences.

"Preparing a ballet based on choreographies conceived in the 15-century feels like being an 'Archaeologist of Movement,'" says artist, **Francesco Vezzoli**. "It's truly challenging and exciting."

"My collaboration with Vezzoli has allowed me to immerse myself in a style of dancing I had previously not

yet performed,” says **David Hallberg**, principal dancer for the Bolshoi and American Ballet Theatre. “Renaissance social dancing happened centuries before the formation of classical ballet. What fascinates me is how this movement evolved into the birth of classical ballet. This is a very academic study by two modern day artists, offering an intriguing balance between the two.”

For this revolutionary performance, Vezzoli and Hallberg, in collaboration with **Deda Cristina Colonna** — dancer, art historian, and period choreographer — bring into question the powerful rituals of the courts, historical dance repertoire, and the roles of dancer and audience. “Hallberg was a special choice for this piece as his repertoire is so far away from this form of practice. Every fiber of his body is tuned into dance,” explains Colonna. “This performance represents dance in the now and here. Hallberg’s body makes it now and his senses make it here.”

The sixth edition of Performa’s biennial brings together more than **30 artists from 12 countries** around the world to participate in three weeks of exciting programming including Performa Commissions, Performa Projects, Performa Premieres, Performa Hub, Pavilion Without Walls, and more—breaking down the boundaries between visual art, music, dance, poetry, film, and architecture. With Performa 15, Performa celebrates its 10th Anniversary and illuminates the extensive influence of the organization and its program. Performa 15 marks a more selective edition, adding extraordinary new work to the genre—highlighting a strong group of new artists while celebrating returning artists in honor of its first decade.

Since its inception, Performa has been a leader in commissioning artists whose works have shaped a new chapter in the multi-century legacy of visual artists working in live performance. **Performa 15 will take place on November 1 – 22, 2015, at various locations throughout New York City.**

“With *Fortuna Desperata*, two remarkable artists look squarely at the DNA of their individual art trajectory, confronting history and classicism, and pulling it through a fine sieve of what it means to be contemporary in the 21st century” says **RoseLee Goldberg, founding director and curator of Performa**. “For Hallberg, it’s a way of understanding the 600 year old muscle memory embedded in his body through ballet, and for Vezzoli, it means recognizing the aesthetic and philosophical weight that a young Italian artist necessarily carries with him through life. Hallberg describes the process of this past year as being “a scientific investigation of the essence of dance” and Vezzoli as an “archeology of movement, the one area from the Renaissance that has left no physical trace.””

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While contemporary dance relies on the relationship of audience and performer set in a frontal perspective, 15th century dance served as a form of court entertainment and pedantry for young noblemen, where participants acquired an elasticity of mind and perception. This early form of dance involved peer-to-peer interactions and participation but was not perceived as a performance. On the contrary, the intimacy of these rituals represented higher ideals of advancing human nature through a social harmony, reviving the philosophies of Neoplatonism.

Fortuna Desperata explores dance in a period before there were dancers with Hallberg acting as a vehicle to translate this historical moment. “I don’t believe in mere reconstruction of the past dance repertoire, but rather in taking the chance to use it as a springboard towards a contemporary experience,” explains Colonna of her choreography. Drawing from the historical texts and materials that contain the movement and shape of the dance, the choreography uses the dancer’s body as a filter to translate these words into a physical dance in a contemporary context. According to Colonna, Hallberg and Vezzoli provide the ideal framework for this piece to happen right here and now as they lend an accomplished sensitivity to the disarming simplicity of 15th century court dance, “revealing what for me is the fundamental role of dance: a temporary solution of the time/space conflict.”

During the 15th century, dance was one of the humanistic practices that fostered a culture of self-control, considered an ideal quality for the Renaissance aristocrat. Dance was considered an exercise of ethical virtue that not only gave physical pleasure to the body, but also stimulated the mind as it required an in depth knowledge of the rules and social cues associated with the ritual. Like other artists in this period, including poets, painters, architects, the ultimate goal was to use the art form as a means to transcend human nature and produce a shared experience rather than as mere entertainment.

Due to their low status in the court, biographical information about Renaissance dancing masters is limited, however details has been gathered from financial records and descriptions of celebrations and social gatherings. Using the existing knowledge, Colonna reconstructed dances for this piece from the histories behind three key dancing masters from this period:

1. **Domenico da Piacenza (or da Ferrara)** is the probable author of the manuscript ***De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi***, written in Italian in the third person despite its Latin title. Involved with the court of Leonello d'Este in Ferrara, Piacenza was likely the choreographer for the wedding celebration between Tristano Sforza and Beatrice d'Este (Milan, 1455), and for the betrothal of Ippolita Sforza and Alfonso Duke of Calabria (Milan, 1455). Listed as a member of the Court of Este in Ferrara from 1456 on, he was also knighted *Cavaliere dello Speron d'Oro*.
2. **Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro (William the Jew from Pesaro)** is the pupil and possible assistant of Domenico da Piacenza. Pesaro's treatise ***De practica seu arte tripudii vulgare opusculum*** was found in seven different copies and a few fragments of manuscripts. Pesaro changed his name to Giovanni Ambrosio after converting to Catholicism, probably due to his involvement with the Sforza court in Milan (St. Ambrogio is the patron saint of Milan). Like his master Domenico, he was knighted *Cavaliere dello Speron d'Oro* and was active in the courts of Ferrara, Camerino, Pesaro, Ravenna, Bologna, Urbino, Forlì, Milano, Parma, Pavia, Napoli, Padova, Venezia, Mantova. Pesaro was also involved with the Sforza court for a significant period in his career and dedicated the first copy of his manuscript to Galeazzo; Ippolita Sforza was his beloved pupil. He then followed her to Naples in 1465, when she married Alfonso d'Aragona, Duke of Calabria. His presence as dancing master was requested by the King Ferdinando I, who wanted his daughters Eleonora and Beatrice to learn the art of *ballare lombardo* (Lombard dancing; Milan is the capital of Lombardy), which Ippolita mastered well. Guglielmo also worked together with his son Pier Paolo at the Montefeltro court of Urbino, where elegance and refinement were brought by Caterina Colonna, when she married Guidantonio. He was also Isabella d'Este's dancing master and preceptor in Ferrara.
3. **Antonio Cornazano** is the author of the ***Libro dell'arte del danzare intitolato e composto per Antonio Cornazano***. Cornazano was a noble man and a humanist who wrote lyrical, encomiastic, and religious poetry, as well as biographies and military treatises. A well-known dancing master and dancer, he received a very refined education, ranging from classical and modern languages, to military theory and practice, and the art of dancing. Cornazano's presence as dancing master for Ippolita Sforza is documented in Milan in 1455. He attended the wedding of Tristano Sforza and Beatrice d'Este, and the betrothal of Ippolita Sforza, to whom he dedicated the first copy (now lost) of his treatise. When Ippolita went to Naples she probably brought that dancing manual with her and a second copy was commissioned by her brother. Cornazano worked in Venice, at the service of the warlord Bartolomeo Colleoni, and later in Ferrara, at the Este court, until the end of his life.

OPENING NIGHT PERFORMANCE DETAILS:

The performance will take place in the historic St. Bart's Church, consisting of a 48-minute long program of dances as performed during social gatherings 15th century Italian court. The audience will be seated along the perimeter of the room on risers allowing them to view the specially designed geometrical floor patterns incorporated into the choreography. The entire set was conceptualized by Stefan Beckman.

Fortuna Desperata begins the moment the audience enters the performance space. Adorned with 15th century anatomical images painted onto his body, Hallberg stands at the focus of the performance space with the song "Fortuna Desperata" playing in the background. The song will play four times, with Hallberg turning to face a different side of the audience as they are seated. Once the audience settles, the other dancers will enter the space with Hallberg's costume and help him get dressed for the feature presentation. The program will end with a solo by David Hallberg, using the same 15th-century dance vocabulary. Special thanks to Prada for providing David Hallberg's custom attire for the performance.

ABOUT PERFORMA:

Founded in 2004 by art historian and curator RoseLee Goldberg, Performa is the leading organization dedicated to exploring the critical role of live performance in the history of twentieth-century art and encouraging new directions in performance for the twenty-first century. Since launching New York's first performance biennial, Performa 05, in 2005, the organization has solidified its identity as a commissioning and producing entity. As a "museum without walls," Performa provides important art historical heft to the field by showing the development of live art in all its forms from many different cultural perspectives reaching back to the Renaissance. The Performa Biennial is celebrated world wide as the first biennial to give specialized attention to this remarkable history, transforming the city of New York into the 'world capital of artists' performance' every other November. Performa attracts a national and international audience of more than 200,000 and receives more than 5,000,000 website hits during its three week run. In the last decade Performa has presented 592 performances, worked with 732 artists, and toured commissioned performances in 17 countries around the world.

The Curatorial Team for Performa 15 is led by RoseLee Goldberg and includes Performa curators Adrienne Edwards, Charles Aubin, and Mark Beasley, as well as curators from a consortium of more than 30 cultural institutions. Performa 15 is produced by Esa Nickle.

For more on Performa and its programs including the Performa Biennial, please visit <http://performa-arts.org/>.

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BIENNIAL SUPPORTERS:

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[Photo credit: Francesco Vezzoli and David Hallberg, 2015; photo by Francesco Vezzoli, courtesy of L'Uomo Vogue, Conde Nast Italia]

****NOTE TO THE EDITORS****

ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

Francesco Vezzoli (b. 1971, Brescia, Italy) studied at the Central St. Martin's School of Art in London and currently lives and works in Milan. His work has been exhibited at many institutions including: "The Films of Francesco Vezzoli," The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2002); Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin (2002); Fondazione Prada, Milan (2004 & 2005); Museu Serralves, Porto (2005); Le Consortium, Dijon (2006); "Francesco Vezzoli: Right You Are If You Think You Are," a Performa Commission, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, "Marlene Redux: A True Hollywood Story (Part One)," Tate Modern, London (2006); "Dali Dali Featuring Francesco Vezzoli," Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2009–10); "Marlene Redux: A True Hollywood Story!" Kunsthalle Wien (2009); The Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow (2010); "Museum of Crying Women," Qatar Museums Authority, Doha; "The Trinity: Galleria Vezzoli," MAXXI, Rome, Italy (2013); and "The Trinity: Cinema Vezzoli," MOCA, Los Angeles (2014). Past performances include "Right You Are (If You Think You Are)," a Performa Commission, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (2007) and "Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2009).

David Hallberg (b. 1982, Rapid City, South Dakota) is an American classical ballet dancer. He is a principal dancer for the Bolshoi Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, and became the first American to become a principal dancer with the Bolshoi in 2011. Hallberg has danced all the leading male roles in the classical ballet repertoire. Including the Bolshoi and ABT, he has danced with almost every major company worldwide. Hallberg was a recipient of the Princess Grace Fellowship and the Chris Hellman Dance Award, and won the Benois de la Danse Award in 2010 in Moscow. Most recently he was awarded the Bell Foundation award for emerging artist from Americans for the Arts. At ABT, he has created the David Hallberg scholarship, mentoring emerging male dancers and The Innovation Initiative, a platform for emerging choreographic talent.

Deda Cristina Colonna (b. 1964, Novara, Italy) is a stage director and choreographer; her repertoire of choice is classical and baroque opera, as well as the thorough-composed operas of later repertoires. Although centered on historically informed practice, her work seeks contact with contemporary audiences through the use of a modern style, influenced by drama and contemporary theatre. She graduated in ballet at Civico Istituto Musicale Brera in Novara and at Ecole Supérieure d'Etudes Chorégraphiques in Paris, and holds a degree from the dance department of the Sorbonne, where she specialized in Baroque Dance and Italian/French Renaissance Dance with a thesis on the manuscript of Domenico da Piacenza. Her research on baroque dance has been published in the proceedings of numerous international conferences and she acted as the Director of the Dance School of Civico Istituto Brera in Novara from 2005-2013. In 2014 she was Guest Visiting Professor at Operahögskolan/Stockholm Konstnärliga Högskolan—Performing Premodernity/University of Stockholm.