World Premiere of Tesseracts of Time: A Dance for Architecture

Collaboration by Steven Holl and Jessica Lang
Premiering at the Harris Theater in Chicago on November 6, 2015
Commissioned by the Chicago Architecture Biennial

October 22, 2015—Steven Holl Architects and Jessica Lang are proud to present the world premiere of Tesseracts of Time; a brand new work commissioned by the Chicago Architecture Biennial, premiering at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Chicago on Friday, November 6.

Both Architecture and dance share a passion for space and light in time, however they are on opposite ends of the spectrum with respect to time. Architecture is one of the arts of longest duration, while the realization of a dance piece can be a quick process and the work disappears as the performance of it unfolds. Corresponding to the four seasons, but within a twenty minute period, the collaboration between choreographer Jessica Lang and Steven Holl merges dance and architecture in a compression of time and space.

“The body moving through space in time is a central experience of both architecture and dance,” said Steven Holl. “To collaborate on a ‘Dance for Architecture’ with Jessica Lang is an inspiring chance to experiment with the merging of the two arts, focusing on time, form, light, and movement.”

“Collaboration is an essential part of making great art,” said Jessica Lang. “Having the opportunity to work intensely with architect Steven Holl on Tesseracts of Time has been a valuable process that will inform my work well beyond the creation of this piece. Together, we have pushed the boundaries of dance and architecture and the result will awaken the human imagination.”
The four sections of the dance correspond to the four types of architecture: **Under** the ground, **In** the ground, **On** the ground, and **Over** the ground.

The first section ‘UNDER’ begins with a slow movement of sunlight coming from above, sweeping across the curved interior spaces of the architecture. The dance physically vibrates in the dark shadows of the stage. Dancers are dressed in black geometric and angular costumes. Their movement is grounded and driven with linear thought to the percussive score *Anvil Chorus* by David Lang.

For the second section ‘IN’, compressed spatial sequences filled in deep light are projected in film. The dance movement defies gravity and explores geometry with emotional expression. Space and body in black and white work in synchrony with the minimalist piano music *Patterns in a Chromatic Field* by Morton Feldman.

The third section ‘ON’—all in white—reveals on stage three twelve-foot-tall Tesseract Fragments. In geometry, the tesseract is the four-dimensional analog of a cube. In dance, the movement explores space now present in the 3rd dimension of the stage. The music is percussive, prepared piano *The Perilous Night* by John Cage.

The fourth section ‘OVER’, begins with the tension of sound and energy as the Tesseracts rise upwards to the music *Metastaseis* by Iannis Xenakis. Unlike the previous sections, bursting color floods the stage with dancers in asymmetrical colors of oranges and reds. Arvo Pärt’s *Solfeggio* takes shape in a synthesis of chromatic forms as the dance releases like a sunrise into intensely lyrical and hypnotic meditative phrases.
In this work, one can imagine the four stages like the four seasons which are compressed into just twenty minutes. With 525,600 minutes in one year, this compressed ratio would render an average human life as four years. Like Seasons, the ending returns to the darkness of ‘UNDER’ at the beginning. No beginning, no ending.

“Seeing the creative process behind Tesseracts of Time and working with Jessica and Steven, and the Chicago Architecture Biennial, to bring it to life has been an especially rewarding mission,” said Harris Theater President and Managing Director Michael Tiknis. “The natural collaboration between these two visionaries was magic, and the work is so rich as a result. Presenting the world premiere of Tesseracts of Time will be the Harris’ distinct honor. With the Joyce Theater Foundation and Houston Society for the Performing Arts as co-commissioners alongside the Harris, this collaboration will continue to make its mark across the country.”

The architecture used in the dance was developed through a research project called ‘Explorations of IN.’ This project started June 2014 at Steven Holl Architects and explores questions of architectural language. It aims to re-value the Art of Architecture.

Lang and Holl carefully chose music that has influenced them both in their individual work, and for its architectonic qualities, studied at Columbia University’s design program The Architectonics of Music, led by Steven Holl and Dimitra Tsachrelia. This “dance for architecture” is set to music by David Lang, Morton Feldman, John Cage, Iannis Xenakis and Arvo Pärt.
Steven Holl Architects has realized architectural works nationally and overseas, with extensive experience in the arts (including museum, gallery and exhibition design), campus and educational facilities, residential work and master planning. Steven Holl Architects is a 40-person architecture and urban design office founded in 1976, and working globally as one office from two locations; New York City and Beijing. Steven Holl leads the office with partners Chris McVoy and Noah Yaffe. Most recently completed are the Reid Building at the Glasgow School of Art (Glasgow, UK), which opened in April 2014; Campbell Sports Center at Columbia University (New York, NY), which was completed in March 2013; and the Daeyang Gallery and House (Seoul, Korea) which opened in June 2012. Steven Holl Architects currently has eight projects under construction, including the John F. Kennedy Center Expansion in Washington, D.C.; the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston; the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University; the Visual Arts Building at the University of Iowa; and the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA.

Jessica Lang has been hailed as “a master of visual composition” by Dance Magazine and is known for her striking design elements, and emotionally engaging contemporary works. Lang is a New York City Center Fellow for 2015 and the recipient of the prestigious 2014 Bessie Award. Her company, Jessica Lang Dance, was created through Lang’s receipt of a Joyce Theater Artist Residency and has made rapid success performing at renowned venues and festivals around the country including Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival, Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, New York City Center’s Fall for Dance Festival, the Kennedy Center Concert Hall, the Joyce Theater and the Winspear Opera House in Dallas, TX.

To learn more about the Harris Theater, please visit HarrisTheaterChicago.org. Call the Box Office at 312.334.7777 to request a brochure or additional information. The Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Chicago’s state-of-the art 1,525-seat performance venue, can also be found on Facebook and Twitter.

Notes:

1. The project ‘Explorations of IN’ started on June 2014 at Steven Holl Architects and explores questions of architectural language. It aims to explore what is possible, to re-value the Art of Architecture. It aims at quality before quantity and inner special energy, shaping public space and social openness.

2. The music for this dance was chosen for its architectonic qualities and has been studied at Columbia University’s GSAPP program in the advanced design studio titled The Architectonics of Music, taught by Steven Holl and Dimitra Tsachrelia.

3. The composer Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001) was a key figure in twentieth-century music and architecture, working as an architect in the Paris studio of Le Corbusier from 1947 to 1959. After his collaboration with Le Corbusier, Xenakis continued as a composer and architect, with a lifelong ambition to overlap the two disciplines.

4. Morton Feldman (1927-1987) was an experimental composer whose music is extremely abstract. Concerning his 1981 composition Patterns in a Chromatic Field, Feldman wrote:

   I feel I listen to my sounds, and I do what they tell me, not what I tell them, because I owe my life to these sounds.

   For Tesseracts of Time: A Dance for Architecture, sections from Feldman’s work were selected from the ninety-minute composition according to their subdued coloration and rhythmic activity.
Credits:

Tesseracts of Time
Concept: Steven Holl in collaboration with Jessica Lang
 Directed and Choreographed by: Jessica Lang
 Architectural Design Direction: Dimitra Tsachrelia
 Music: David Lang, Morton Feldman, John Cage, Iannis Xenakis and Arvo Pärt
 Lighting Design: Nicole Pearce
 Costume Design: Bradon McDonald
 Filming and editing: Ruoyu Wei
 Film Consultant: Milan Misko
 Stage set Construction: Paper Mâché Monkey
 ‘Explorations of IN’ project team: Ruoyu Wei, Yuliya Savelyeva

Dancers: Clifton Brown, Randy Castillo, Julie Fiorenza, John Harnage, Eve Jacobs, Kana Kimura, Laura Mead, Milan Misko, Jammie Walker

Lead Commissioner: Chicago Architecture Biennial
 Commissioning Partners: John and Caroline Ballantine, Sandra and Jack Guthman, Michael and Sharon Tiknis through the Imagine campaign, Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Society for the Performing Arts, and The Joyce Theater Foundation.

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