

# Los Angeles Times

## CALENDAR

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Photographs by GLENN KOENIG/Los Angeles Times

**PRIMAL:** Tomas Tamayo and other members of Trip Dance Theatre rehearse "Body," a 30-minute segment of Favand's "Breath and Bone."

## Trip preparation

Monica Favand, founder and artistic director of Trip Dance Theatre, says she likes to stay in the moment, but she was destined to be on the move.

By VICTORIA LOOSELEAF  
Special to The Times

**T**O an aquatic soundscape of singing whales, dripping water and rolling waves, dancer-choreographer Monica Favand, swathed in yards of pale blue silk, glides across the floor with tiny steps reminiscent of a geisha's. If, that is, the geisha was also capable of striking one-legged poses, tossing off high-energy pirouettes and executing sinewy backward bends.

The founder and artistic director of the locally based Trip Dance Theatre, Favand, along with several other dancers, is rehearsing "Beneath the Water," a number from the evening-length program, "Breath and Bone," that the company will perform at Hollywood's Unknown Theater for two weekends beginning Friday.

The troupe, which uses original scores composed by the five-member Trip Music Ensemble — led by Favand's partner, guitarist Charlie Campagna — works collaboratively to create its multimedia pieces. It is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and recently returned from its first New York City gig, at the Joyce SoHo.

For the 35-year-old Favand, however, the creative life has been her calling since adolescence. The native of Baltimore, who graduated *summa cum laude* from Philadelphia's Temple University, danced for four seasons with that city's Group Motion troupe before moving to Los Angeles in 1995. Once here, she quickly became part of the dance scene and performed with Loretta Livingston and Dancers before founding her own troupe.

"Loretta is extremely professional and has a strong work ethic," Favand says. "But I'm not cut out to do other people's work. The fun part for me is making the work as much as performing. I started to look for people that might want to work with me, and it was important to present multimedia work where others could express themselves in movement and reconnect with their bodies."

Favand, whose hair is pulled back for the rehearsal into a chic bun that offsets her Roman nose and big blue eyes, expresses herself not only through dance but also through costuming. In 1997, the Dance Resource Center gave her a Lester Horton Award for her design and assemblage of all of Trip's garb — which has included upper-body casts with twigs sprouting from plaster heads, shredded scrapheap ensembles and arrays of color-coordinated togs.

Her creations for "Breath and Bone" include silk tops and capri pants in saf-

frons and golds, the fabric and colors influenced by a trip to Bali she and Campagna, 36, took in 2004 after they were awarded APPEX Fellowships by the Asian Pacific Performance Exchange, an international musicians and artists residency program. The couple spent six weeks with 14 musicians, dancers and puppeteers, most of them from South Asia.

"Bali was a spiritual, magical place," Favand recalls. The experience was also a major influence on her movement style. "I began to incorporate a lot of succinct and intricate arm gestures from Indonesian-style dance into my work."

By the same token, Campagna, son of jazz musician Joe Campagna, was affected by the way groups of Balinese worked together artistically.

"Families, even the aunts and children, all are part of the music," says the composer, who adds that "another influence was the sound coming from all around. Even when you're sleeping, you hear birds and insects and gamelan practice a mile away." Not coincidentally, the soundtrack he created for the upcoming performances emanates from four channels.

The director of UCLA's Center for Intercultural Performance, Judy Mitoma, who launched APPEX, observed Favand and Campagna at close range in Bali.

"I admire their long-term commitment," she says. "It's not about flash, it's not about the next big show with them, it's about consistency and building. They have great integrity combined with this open, creative spirit. There is an adventuresome quality that made them valuable players in the program."

### Spreading her wings

**S**INCE founding Trip, Favand has created 11 evening-length productions and performed more than 100 times in 32 Southland venues and on the East Coast. Those performances included site-specific works at UCLA's Armand Hammer Museum and Skirball Cultural Center, and the company has also been part of the annual Sola Festival and made its fifth appearance at the Music Center's holiday celebration in December. Next summer, Trip has been booked to play the Ford Amphitheatre for the third time.

Favand has integrated herself into the community in other ways too. For the last seven years, the company has offered Sacred Spaces Workshops, a weekly two-hour class at Santa Monica's Church in Ocean Park, where, she says, a thousand people between ages 20 and 70 have participated.

"We have five core musicians, including Charlie, and I provide imagery that takes people into solo dances as well as dances with partners," she explains.

Until last year, Favand had a day job to support her passion, but then the company received a \$20,000 California Community Foundation/Visual Arts Initiative Grant.

It enabled the seven members (including Favand), ages 24 to 42, to create "Breath and Bone," which also incorporates video by Carol Gehring and live vocals by a trio of women — Favand's New York City-based sister, Renee Favand, along with Moira Smiley and Jessica Basta of the local quintet VOCCO.

In a 30-minute segment of "Breath and Bone," "Body," the dancers do a bit of vocalizing themselves in addition to exploring themes of connection, disconnection and primal instincts.

Some of their moves reflect pain, others pleasure; all grew out of Favand's conversations and teamwork with the dancers.

"I was inspired by the way the body holds memory in the muscle and how these memories can get stuck," she says. "I wanted a diverse range of emotions — what it's like when an Achilles' tendon snaps or how it feels being tickled by your mother."

Tomas Tamayo, 42 and the lone male in the group, is in his second season with Trip.

"I love it," he says. "My masculine energy comes out, and Monica provides a stable foundation for artists who like to work with voice, theater and dance. It's hard to find a company open to so many diverse languages."

This being Los Angeles, a city without a nonacademic venue devoted exclusively to dance, it's also difficult to find a good, affordable space in which to perform regularly. But last October, Chris Covics, a Favand pal from Philadelphia, opened the Unknown Theater. The 2,000-square-foot black box, with a sprung floor and a bar/cafe, seats up to 75 people.

In addition to mounting plays with his Unknown Theater Company, Covics, 36, donated rehearsal space to Trip as part of a residency that includes two evenings of music by the Trip Music Ensemble and VOCCO (Thursday and Jan. 12). A dance aficionado, Covics plans to program four months of dance yearly. The local company Ballet Collective will be onstage this month.

As for Favand, she says she doesn't like to think too far into the future, although she and Campagna do plan to marry in October.

"I like to stay in the moment," she says, "but I want to start a family and have that in my mind. I also dream of doing what I love on a scale that doesn't make me crazy, but with top-quality artists doing the best work we can."

"At one point in history, dance was naturally part of life, but now it's harder to find places to be comfortable expressing yourself in movement," she says. Yet "for me, it's hard to imagine what else I would be doing."

### Trip Dance Theatre

**Where:** Unknown Theater, 1110 N. Seward St., Hollywood

**When:** 8 p.m. Friday, Saturday and Jan. 13 and 14

**Price:** \$18 and \$22

**Contact:** (323) 466-7781



**IN RESIDENCE:** Favand and her dancers rehearse at the Unknown Theater in Hollywood, where a friend of Favand's has given her troupe a venue in a city where it's difficult to find performance space.