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Dance, discrimination 'TOUCHED' at New Festival

By Jenn Urganus

PGN Associate Editor

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Reach out, be "TOUCHED," and feel Paule Turner's pain.

Turner, an out performance artist based in Philadelphia, will reveal his internal bruises in "TOUCHED," premiering June 1 during the first New Festival at Arts Bank on The Avenue of the Arts.

Through narrative dance, "TOUCHED" will examine methods to eliminate discrimination.

"I think it's more dangerous we're not talking and communicating," said Turner, a dance professor at Rowan University in Glassboro, N.J. "We don't know anything about each other as blacks, whites, gays, straights ... I don't think we spend enough time evaluating."

Turner, who also runs the dance ensemble, c o u r t, said he faces unique challenges as a black man.

"I put myself out to be noticed," Turner explained. "Most people get up in the morning, and dress not to be noticed. I'm more now about looking around and being more vulnerable."

"Why am I threatening to them? As a black man, am I exercising a freedom I'm not supposed to have?"

Filled with full frontal nudity and potentially disturbing images of religion and sexuality, "TOUCHED" features a series of monologues.

"It's not about igniting race wars ... the piece isn't looking for big sympathy," Turner explained. "We're not afraid to reveal the contradictory things that go on in our heads."

In existence since 1999, c o u r t tackles the topics of racism, sexuality, lost love and betrayal in evening-length pieces lasting 45 to 90 minutes. "TOUCHED" will be c o u r t's third work.



Not only has Turner been busy producing "TOUCHED," but he's also been consumed with creating the New Festival with friend and colleague Melanie Stewart of Melanie Stewart Dance Theatre.

Almost three years in the making, the festival will feature 21 events over a two-week period.

"It's [the festival] very dynamic and exciting," Stewart told PGN. "If people want to get really cozy and up close and personal with artists, this is the festival to do it."

Stewart, who is also chairwoman of the theater and dance departments at Rowan University, said her greatest challenge as producer and curator of the New Festival is

trying to honor every performer's artistry.

"It's a huge learning curve right now," she said.

Stewart's "Babel," a political parable that ridiculed the lust for supremacy and the religious zeal to justify it, premiered last September in the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival.

If you go

What: Paule Turner/

c o u r t will premiere "TOUCHED" during the first New Festival

When: June 1-5

Where: Arts Bank, 601 S. Broad St.

Information: Call (215) 413-3790; Web site: www.newfestival.net



