

flying high

Project in Motion soars into the Las Cruces arts scene

by Cassie McClure

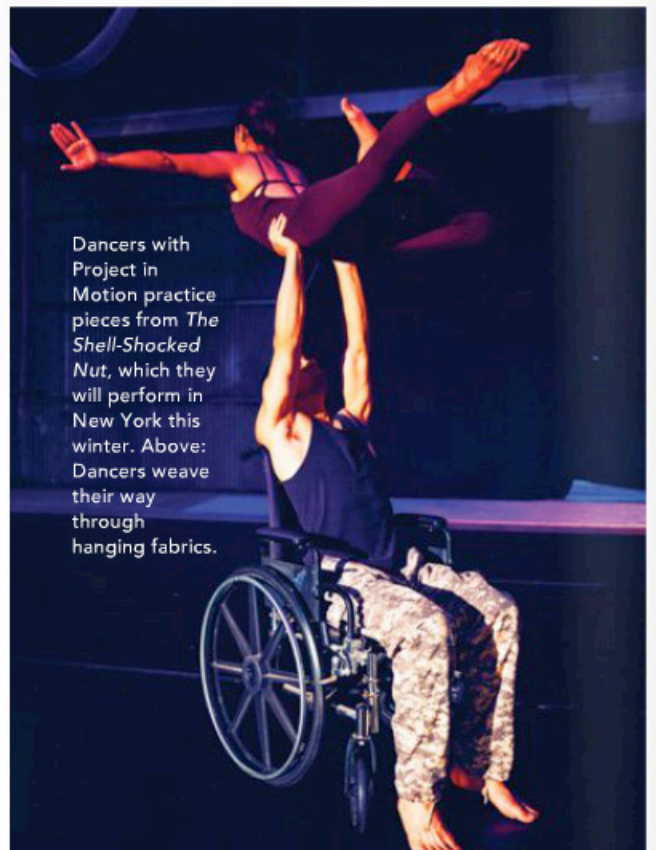
Photographs by Avraham Elias

Out in an old cotton mill in Las Cruces, artists are experiencing a new type of freedom, freedom to explore the adrenaline of both terrestrial and aerial dance. Project in Motion is setting the bar high into the artistic rafters, helping to turn Las Cruces into a hub for aerial arts.

Since 1998, Project in Motion has trained a bevy of artists to climb up silk fabrics, swing on traveling rings, and find balance on stilts. "For me, it's natural to want to climb; all kids want to climb because we're simian in nature," says Hilary McDaniel-Douglas, artistic/executive director for PIM. "It's also a return to strength, a reaffirmation of my own power as a person—a confidence I see in all my dancers."

Since 1998, Project in Motion has trained a bevy of artists to climb up silk fabrics, swing on traveling rings, and find balance on stilts.

The troupe, which is comprised of five members and four apprentices, splits its time between Las Cruces and Indianapolis, but also performs elsewhere. In January, La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in New York will host Project in Motion's performance as a part of The East Village Dance Project's *The Shell-Shocked Nut*. A version of the *Nutcracker*, the performance is about soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder, with one of the dancers playing a romantic



Dancers with Project in Motion practice pieces from *The Shell-Shocked Nut*, which they will perform in New York this winter. Above: Dancers weave their way through hanging fabrics.

lead from a wheelchair. "It's something I always wanted to do," says McDaniel-Douglas. "I grew up with my mother in a wheelchair; she was a polio victim at 16."

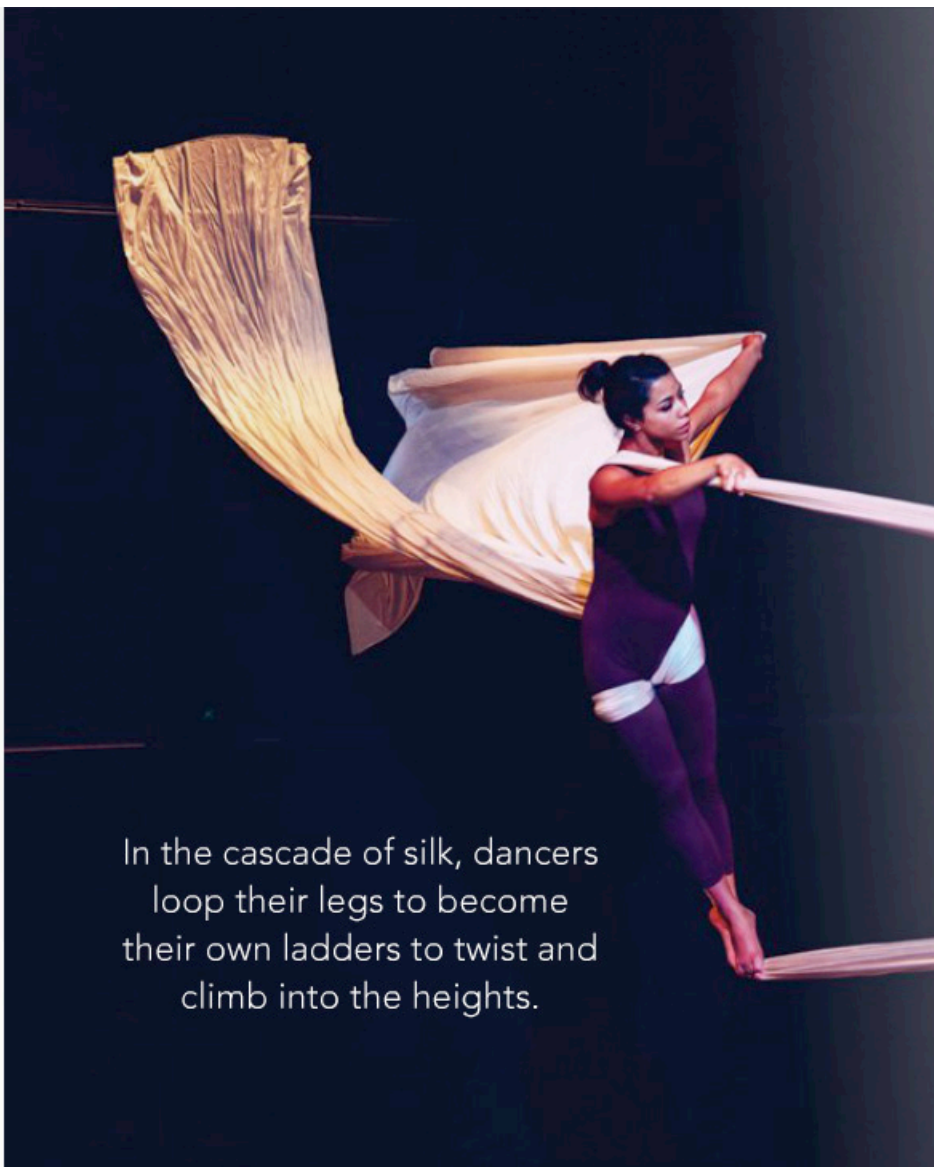
PIM's performances go beyond the novelty of simple levitation, integrating floor movements and aerial acrobatics that develop and progress the narrative. Lauren Mendoza, who joined PIM in 2011, says the hardest part is not the strength needed. "It's creating a work of art that lures in the audience with a story and brings them into a different world," she says.

Angel Flores, a 13-year gymnastics coach, says what he has learned about performance with PIM has been invaluable. "I build a relationship and engage the crowd even while I'm doing a crazy awesome stunt," he says. "The state of awe they experience lets their own imagination pull them in."

Flores, who started gymnastics late in high school, teaches some of the classes that PIM offers to the community, with a new schedule coming out in the fall. "People get to a certain age and believe they can't do anything athletic," he says. "I'm proof that you can put your childhood dreams into action."

Indeed, their space at The Gin Studios is what a playground for adults would look like, if set in an abandoned metal-sided warehouse. The space is wide open; mats are placed under the fabrics and are hooked onto the catwalk.

As the dancers warm up and embrace the hanging fabric or practice their floor routines, there is a sense of ease and relaxation in their movements. In the cascade of silk, dancers loop their legs to become their own ladders to twist and climb into the heights. After a few



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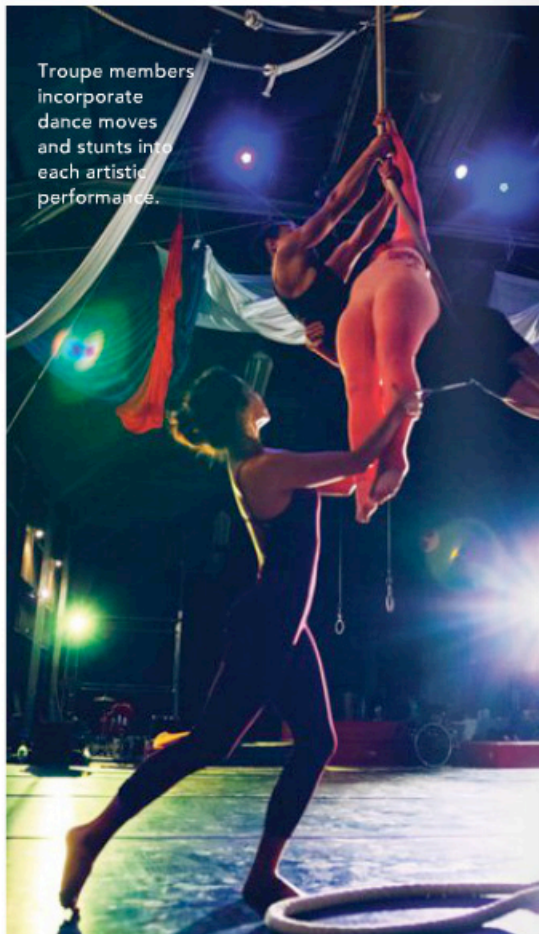


Left: Project in Motion is made up of five regular members and four apprentices. The troupe divides its time between Indianapolis and Las Cruces, where it performs at The Gin Studios.

wraps around the abdomen, thigh, or foot, a dancer arches her back and leans, carving lines into the air with her body.

PIM's 2014–2015 season is titled *Feet and Wings: Fifteen Years of Motion*. The troupe will perform *Black Box Concert 2* in Las Cruces on February 21, and will continue with their *Feet and Wings* performances March 13–15 at The Gin Studios.

McDaniel-Douglas believes their work is an avenue to create and showcase local artistic excellence. “We are cultural ambassadors for the area,” she says. “But we also want to expand Las Cruces’ horizons and give it artistic hope.”



Troupe members incorporate dance moves and stunts into each artistic performance.



A performer prepares to lift himself into the air with the help of aerial fabric draped from the rafters.

resources

Project in Motion
projectinmotion.com