

# HYSTERICA DANCE



by Camille Lowry  
Photo by Dan Monick  
Illustration by Zach Gibson

The Hysterica Dance Company just celebrated their 10th anniversary. For the past decade the troupe has given exploratory aesthetic performances with choreography that is powerful, urban, sensual and raw. Their popularity has spread from the typical modern dance fans to include a following in the fashion, entertainment and visual arts worlds.

Ryan Heffington, the company's co-artistic director and costume designer says, "What helps draw those types of people is that our music is progressive; the fashion we use is progressive. People are inspired by that, and love not just the dance, but the whole presentation. We're not a typical modern company."

Kitty McNamee, founder and artistic director, explains the meaning of the company's name as "female madness" or "madness of the womb." The female madness theme is interesting considering the company is co-ed in terms of both the roster of dancers, and the spectrum of movement she designs.

McNamee says, "There's a lot of gender-bending in the company. We don't limit the women or the men. The women are all beautiful and feminine, but have a lot of power. The men in my company have strength, are masculine, but also have a very feminine side."

In fact, Heffington performs occasionally in drag, as his alter ego, Dirty Diana. He explains that Diana looks like a man, but has the persona of a woman. "I'm hairy and I'm in three-inch stilettos. It's not traditional drag." He calls himself a "tranimal," then adds, "It's a new breed."

A prerequisite of being a performer in Hysterica is having a strong, complex personality. McNamee says, "They have to be open to revealing that on stage. It's as much part of the performance as the physical." She explains that her dancers' individuality inspires her choreography. "I like to dig into the psyche of people, of the dancers and myself. That's where I always start. And then I add music. If I can marry those two things then I'm in business."

Heffington, a designer whose fashion creations have been seen on Gwen Stefani and Beck, has brought great attention to Hysterica for the dance company's costumes. His clothes push the envelope of everyday street wear, and bring a certain accessibility and hipness to dancewear. Heffington explains, "I think it just enhances the dance. If a painter paints a beautiful picture and it's not hung right, it ruins it. We're trying to pay attention to every detail."

The work of Hysterica reflects and references current culture, so much so that they've occasionally been categorized as pop. But McNamee shrugs at that label and says, "Pop is popular. Fine with me." She credits their longevity to the fierce commitment of their company members. Heffington agrees: "The passion of dance makes people want to stay in the company. As dancers in L.A. we work a lot commercially. But Hysterica offers us something else. It offers the freedom of expression."

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