



Human Landscape Dance

**Human Landscape Dance** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit incorporated in the District of Columbia. Our mission is to promote the appreciation and understanding of contemporary dance. Our organization develops national and international cultural exchanges through shared performances, education, and dance videos.



ellen rosenberg photography





## Press

Human Landscape Dance is on Washington DC's  
"...Dream Team of local troupes...."

—The Washington Post

"...Human Landscape Dance explored the underbelly of  
myths and folk tales with ingenious choreography and  
staging by founder Malcolm Shute."

—The Washington Post

"...it is pitch-perfect and an element of humor and  
suspense is subtly added..."

—The Philadelphia Inquirer

"Both of Shute's works...were standouts."

—Maryland Theatre Guide

"...intimacy is a trademark of Shute's choreography."

—Gazette.net

## Capital Fringe Review: ‘Finding Home: Dance Journeys’ at Cafritz Hall

*Maryland Theatre Guide*

By Justin Rustle, Published July 18, 2023

“Finding Home: Dance Journeys,” part of the 2023 Capital Fringe Festival at the DCJCC’s Cafritz Hall, featured works by choreographers Giselle Ruzany, Kyoko Fujimoto, Sylvana Christopher and Rachel Lawal with Vigorous Roots Dance Company, and Malcolm Shute, in collaborations with Alexander Short and Katie Sopoci Drake. Stylistically and tonally different, all six of the dances dealt with how to find and explore an idea of “home.”

Both of Shute’s works, “It’s Complicated,” in collaboration with Short, and “Personal Space,” in collaboration with Sopoci Drake, were standouts. “It’s Complicated” set to Wolf Larsen’s “If I be Wrong” was a tender and poignant portrait of love between older men. Supported by Short, Shute rolled through one seemingly weightless spiral after another, always continuing for one more circle than you thought he could, before settling into a grounded embrace. Then on the lyric “what if I can’t,” Shute broke, fell off Short’s body, and dropped to the floor. “What if I’m just an old man?” It was the only heavy and sharp moment in the piece, the only time where Shute seemed to be moved by a gravity. That break threw the soft and caring tactile relationship between the performers into an even more human light. The apparent effortlessness of their physical support for one another became an act of emotional support. It was an exploration of a tactile and emotional sensitivity that would be impossible alone. “It’s Complicated” was also a crowd favorite, eliciting more than one audible exhale of held breath as the lights dimmed.



“Personal Space” danced by Shute and Sopoci Drake was danced entirely on a small table, barely big enough for two people to sit on. Based in experiences of pandemic lockdown, the table—described in the program as a “crowded life raft”—created a free-floating, isolated surface in space which the dancers never left. Not even to bow. Combined with Shute’s original atmospheric score, slightly too astringent and anxious to be lo-fi, and Ian Claar’s soft lighting, the table melted out of space to become either an ethereal dreamscape or an ambient nightmare disarticulated from the plane of reality. This time Shute and Drake’s infinite spirals seemed truncated, always finding a perilous stability both constrained and supported by their table landscape. Every inch of the surface was used, with Sopoci Drake even hooking a foot over the edge at one point to give her the leverage to support Shute. Neither dancer ever reached to a vertical standing position giving the feeling that the table was drawing them down and sucking them in as it simultaneously manifested the space they occupied.

## Diverse paths in dance converge: Crossing Paths Movement Collective presents its Philly première

*Broad Street Review*

By Melissa Strong, Published Mar 21, 2022

### Choreography and connection

Shute's *Cascade* and *Personal Space* were highlights. Pairing contact choreography with gesture, they were performed at a slow pace with constant movement for an effect both visually captivating and evocative. The movement suggested interdependence as well as Covid-era cravings for human connection.

In *Cascade*, set to Albinoni's "Adagio in G Minor," Susan Donham, Roxann Morgan Rowley, Alexander Short, and Shute formed a kinetic shape that was part human pyramid, part nesting doll as their bodies folded into and rested upon each other. Clad in black tops and bottoms spattered with white paint, the dancers leaned on one another, supported each other's bodies, and reached hands to each other's shoulders and cheeks in gestures of caring, support, and solidarity. As these constantly shifted, they effectively captured the ever-evolving dynamics of human relationships and the necessity of giving and receiving.

In *Personal Space*, Katie Sopoci Drake and Shute performed a duet with similar features while sitting, lying, balancing, and moving together on a table. The dancers maintained contact between their bodies as they shifted positions and bore each other's weight. *Personal Space* delved even deeper into relationships as it depicted the sensual and romantic aspects of human intimacy.





## **Review: Spacetime Dance & Human Landscape Dance in 'Topographies: Dance for Land, Air, and Water'**

*Dance Metro DC*

By Val Oliphant, Published November 17, 2018

Katie Sopoci Drake's contemporary dance style and Malcolm Shute's contact choreography intertwined in an exploration of how we interact with our built and natural environments on Saturday evening at the Dance Loft on 14. The performance ping-ponged between pieces by the two choreographers performed by their respective dance companies, Spacetime Dance and Human Landscape Dance, and culminating in an intimate duet between them.

Shute's first piece, "*Tsuru no Ongaeshi* (Crane)," retold a Japanese myth about a crane who turns herself human after falling in love with a farmer. Olivia Serrill, dressed in white, began kneeling on the floor. She dove her torso forward, revealing a man dressed all in black, Alexander Shute, directly behind her. Stitch by stitch, she sewed her arm to his and together they moved as one, arms fluidly flapping. They tumbled over one another without ever losing their physical connection.

As the storm surged in "Crossing," four dancers clad in bright green quietly rolled to the back corner of the stage. "Moss" looked at the transition from life to death, through the parasitic relationship of moss and grass in a Japanese garden. Two couples rolled on top of one another, demonstrating codependency and intimacy akin to young lovers as they cartwheeled, backbended, and contorted over and around each other.

The evening ended with Shute's beautiful but thematically incongruent duet, "Eurydice," danced by Drake and Shute. I couldn't figure out how this classic Greek myth fit into the narrative of the rest of the show. In the final moment, Eurydice grabbed her husband's face and forced him to look her in the eye, the first moment they have made eye contact the entire dance. As he does a double-take, a look of awe and longing flashed across his face — it was a truly touching moment. In a world where many are glued to their devices, we are losing our ability to fully see and connect with what is around us. While not the message of the original myth, it was the perfect ending note for the show.



## **Review: Human Landscape Dance and Code f.a.d. Company at Dance Place**

*The Washington Post*

By Pamela Squires, Published December 9, 2012

The pairing of two companies on different levels was in-your-face clear Saturday at Dance Place. Local company Human Landscape Dance explored the underbelly of myths and folk tales with ingenious choreography and staging by founder Malcolm Shute. In comparison, Raleigh, N.C.-based Code f.a.d. Company's exploration of fashion designers as new gods killed an interesting theme with banal choreography.

Human Landscape Dance is grounded in contact improvisation. Shute put this to good use in "Aurora's Dream," which revealed what Sleeping Beauty was dreaming about all those years. The dream looked a cross between Disneyland and Hieronymus Bosch. The prince was a deviant for having crept into her bedroom. Bad fairies threatened her safety.

In a separate piece, Amanda Abrams was brilliant as the long-suffering Penelope weaving away as she waited years for her husband, Odysseus, to return. For most of "Penelope and Odysseus/Waiting," Abrams remained in a chair, almost magically defying the limits of scale and reach that this imposed. Her arms spoke volumes. In her hands, repetition became a powerful force. What a riveting mover she was.

Shute's final tour de force was the disembodied head of Medusa, performed by Heather Doyle, using eyes, eyebrows and soundlessly moving mouth to convey wonderment at all that she no longer had to bother with now, like painting her toenails. It was delightfully humorous and weird.

