

"Thank you, Boston Theater Critics Association for awarding me this terrific honor. Thank you for celebrating Boston theater and the artists that bring so much joy and thoughtfulness to our area. Yewande, Ruka, and Kira – congratulations. I saw your work and you are forces to be reckoned with.

I've thought a lot about what I wanted to say today, and this is what I've settled on. It's long. It takes more than a village to create a new piece of art. But there is no one to play me off so, I hope you'll bear with me.

In the Fall of 2018, I met and collaborated with music director and composer, Steve Bass. In November of that year, he came to my home and played through his original composition of Swan Lake in Blue. He told me the story he envisioned. And he told me he wanted to use a company of tap and jazz dancers. A few months later, he pitched the idea to Greater Boston Stage Company to produce it on our stage with a full big band playing along with the dancers and with me at the helm. If Steve had learned one thing about me in the few short months we had known each other, it was that I love a good challenge. And this was a goood challenge. I had to create 21 pieces of original choreography that would convey this updated version of Swan Lake coherently to an audience without a single spoken word and without a single sung note. I was going to have to create choreography to music that was going to be improvised every night. That's hard. But I figured, this was it. This was the chance and the challenge, and if not now, when?

I have so many people to thank for getting Swan Lake in Blue produced. I hope I am not leaving anyone out – here goes. My family. My husband Glen for listening to this music over and over and over again. My son Bennett for running spot for us in a pinch. My daughter Abby for telling me every time I was at an impasse that I was creating something to be proud of with Steve – a brand new piece of art – and how many people can say that? All of my friends who drove to Lexington or Stoneham to help me with choreography. They inspired me and instructed me and I could not have done this without them: Kevin Patrick Martin, Taavon Gamble, Ephie Aardema, Andy McLeavey, and Sara Coombs. Thelma Goldberg and all the folks at the Dance Inn for letting us use their space whenever we wanted. Kevin Hill and North Shore Music Theater for those tremendous fans. Robert Issacson for coming in at the 11th hour to make sure my dancers fell safely. The designers – Tori Oakes, Chris Fournier, and Kevin Morris Hutchins – for making it beautiful and magical to look at. Everyone at GBSC, but especially Weylin Symes and Amy Morin for their unwavering knowledge that I could actually accomplish this, Miranda Mitrano for jumping into the marketing fray right after having a baby, and Bryan Miner for, well, everything. The stage management team – Deirdre Benson and – on our ninth show together - Shauwna Grillo. All the musicians – too many to name – but especially George Derrah and Nick Fancese for keeping Steve in line. And the dancers. Who formed a company and originated these roles: Andy McLeavey, Briana Fallon, Gillian Gordon, David Visini, Jackson Jirard, Michael Herring, Michael 'Donut Man' Skrzek, Maya McClain, Lily Lawrence, Claire Lawrence, Erica Lundin, H.C. Lee, and our stunning swan – Sara Coombs. You inspired me each and every day and I can't wait to share a rehearsal room with you all again. And most importantly, Steve. Thank

you for throwing down the gauntlet and giving me the challenge of a lifetime. I can tell you now – I wasn't ACTUALLY sure I could do this. I am so glad I did.

This piece was for my Mom, who always said that anything is better with a tap number in it, for my Dad who I wish with all my heart could have taken me out for ice cream after opening, and for my first and most influential dance teacher – Charlotte Klein who taught me my first shuffle.

These are crazy times. We were lucky to finish the run of Swan Lake in Blue – the last show presented at GBSC before the shut-down. For me, the last moment of normalcy. There is nothing like dancing with, sweating with, and relying on other dancers. Just like there is nothing like sitting in a dark room, breathing with the people around you, watching beautiful storytellers and artists. I look forward to the day we can do that again.

Finally, thank you Elliot Norton committee for supporting this Boston community and especially the theater community development fund. I have been a board member of TCBF for many years and we have never seen greater need in our community than we do now. Your generosity helps this community more than you can imagine.

Again, thank you. And stay healthy.