

Houston Chronicle

05.06.2008

*Nancy Wozny*

A lone dancer stands on a dark stage, looking like any other modern dancer until she begins to move. Her arms remain at her sides, but her incredibly flexible feet contort into pigeon-toed claws or look as if they could double as hands.

The odd opening moments set the tone for Turkish choreographer Aydin Teker's captivating work STKH, the centerpiece of the Big Range Dance Festival's Program B, with performances tonight through Saturday.

"Teker challenges the viewer to reconsider the capabilities of the human body," says Teresa Chapman, an associate professor of dance at the University of Houston and curator of this weekend's performances.

"It's almost like when you watch someone who has no arms eat, draw or pick things up with their toes; the feet are that expressive and articulate."

Teker, a pioneer of modern dance in her country, created the piece for Houston native Kelly Knox, who will perform it here. Teker and Knox taught together for two years at Istanbul, Turkey's Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, where Teker heads the modern-dance department. Teker was putting Knox through some improvisational paces when she noticed the dancer's exceptionally flexible feet.

"The contorted shapes are so strange, and at times my feet look broken. It's almost painful to watch and totally taboo in the dance world to work with sickled or pigeon-toed feet," said Knox, 38.

Knox performs specialized foot and ankle exercises to maintain the suppleness required for the piece and to avoid injury.

Knox has performed the piece in Istanbul, where it premiered in 2000; Ankara, Turkey; Zurich, Switzerland; Paris; and New York. She's excited about presenting it in her hometown.

"This is actually the first time I have performed here since I was 18 and dancing at HSPVA," said Knox, who teaches at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pa.

Although Teker received undergraduate and graduate degrees from New York University, her choreography is relatively unknown in this country.

Knox and Chapman say STKH touches on hidden worlds of beauty by exploring an entirely new vocabulary of movement.

"The piece also gives off this strange feeling of isolation; you almost forget you are watching a person," Chapman said.

"If the audience believes that my feet take on a life of their own, I have done my job," Knox said.

In addition to Teker's provocative work, the evening of dance will include Chapman's new duet, *3 Wishes*; California-based Stephanie Nugent's ode to tight spots, *Small Spaces*; Karen Stokes' lighthearted romp *Sorbet*; and Mechelle Flemming's solo series *What Others Made*.

The festival continues Sunday at 7 p.m. with *The Dance Gathering*, a night of four-minute works by 16 local choreographers. Program C runs June 12-14 with works by more Texas artists.