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RICHARD KENNEDY: YOUNG ARTISTS 2018

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON SCHMIDT



Richard Kennedy fell in love with opera as a child. His local community theater in suburban Ohio served as an escape as well as an entry point for what developed into a life-long passion for the performing arts. “I grew up in the hood and I was obsessed with anything that was not integrated,” Kennedy says. “I saw opera as a way to travel, a way to transform myself.” Today, the self-described experimental opera composer leverages the virtuosic talents he accrued in school—ballet and operatic singing—into creating works that erase the boundary between choreography and environment. “The time you spend training matters,” says Kennedy. “Before I was the paint, now I’m the painter. I am the choreographer and the composer.”

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RICHARD KENNEDY PERFORMING IN FINITY BEACH SUITE: 1.

This fall, Kennedy executed his first performance as part of Performa Afterhours at Public Arts, act one of a three-part opera called *Infinity Beach Suite: 1* (2017). The work meditated on the metronomic waves that wash over us—the revolving door of constant, unrelenting change. Like Kennedy’s past compositions, *Infinity Beach Suite: 1* had some biographical undertones that carried through the dancer’s movements and the soundtrack; the work pointed back to the artist’s recent move from the city to Hudson, New York. “I was frustrated by all the time I didn’t have and all the resources I didn’t have,” he says. “I take time to digest. I use performance as a way to process things.”

Deep into his MFA thesis for Bard, Kennedy, who has performed at MoMA PS1 and on Broadway First National Tours, hopes to create work that speaks beyond personal experience and connects broadly. “The opera is a great way to open up consciousness and propose things that are a little bit preposterous,” Kennedy says. “People are open to it because it’s a fantasy land.”