

## MODERN DANCE

# Their reputation precedes them

## Pilobolus will open Providence art festival

By SHARMA HOWARD • showard@norwichbulletin.com • (860) 425-4235

**P**ilobolus has been hailed as the Cirque du Soleil of the dance world — a catchy moniker if you are a modern dance company and wish to be accessible to audiences.

As some even in the modern dance world will admit, sometimes the works are what they call “abstract” and by and large, are up to interpretation.

But Pilobolus’ reputation for athleticism and sculptural dance works attracted Kathleen Pletcher, executive artistic director of First-Works, a festival of art offerings in Providence.

“Pilobolus is a company that really uses such an incredible vocabulary of visuals and music,” Pletcher said.

Pilobolus lifts the curtain on this year’s First-Works — so named because it seeks to attract new performers and audience members who will each get to experience new works. The festival concludes Nov. 13 with a performance by Grammy Award-winning a capella singing group Sweet Honey In The Rock.

### Comic comes to life

One piece by Pilobolus titled “Hapless Hooligan:

In *Still Moving*,” a tribute to the old style comic strips of the early 20th century, is the result of a collaboration between the dance troupe and Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Art Spiegelman, said one of Pilobolus’ artistic directors, Michael Tracy.

“It’s like watching a comic book come to life; it’s like seeing nothing else you’ve ever seen before,” Tracy said of the narrative work that premiered at Dartmouth College in June.

The piece combines shadows and cartoons projected on a screen with dance, bringing to life a man who is born into a strange black and white world. He proceeds to create his own mate with whom he lives, before journeying with her in an afterlife.

“It’s a funny, surreal story done in a medium that’s different,” Tracy said. Set to an early jazz score and a variety of music, the six-person dance references old comics, such as Dick Tracy and Little Lulu.

### Breadth of style

“Pseudopodia” is quite different from “Hapless Hooligan” and displays the breadth of Pilobolus’ style. The two-hour pro-

gram will showcase five works.

“Pseudopodia,” an early work by the company, features a solo male dancer who rolls around the stage in a red leotard, and is abstract.

“In the beginning our work was energetic, acrobatic and quite abstract,” Tracy said. “Over time, we’ve become more narrative, reflective and psychological. We try to explore the boundaries of what is possible with the human body.”

Costumes, like the dance, run the gamut, and can be “egregiously non-existent to extremely florid,” Tracy said. Pilobolus’ costumes are designed by Liz Prince.

The evening will include another narrative work, “Contradance,” which is also new, and tells the story of individual and group dynamics.

“Most of our pieces have to do with an interacting with a group because this is our everyday experience,” explained Tracy. Set to the music of Dan Zanes, a popular children’s composer, the sound and feel is Americana.

### Athleticism

From abstract to narrative, from expressive to reflective, Pilobolus’

style does have a unifying element: athleticism.

“They can be like animated human sculptures,” Pletcher said in describing the company’s trademark. “They are also very athletic — astoundingly so. They have gravity-defying moves.”

Pilobolus is also known for humor, Tracy said, as well as odd partnering.

The humor started at the inception of the company, with the name Pilobolus, a “feisty fungus” that a company founder, the late Jonathan Wolken who passed away in June, became aware was growing in his father’s laboratory at Dartmouth.

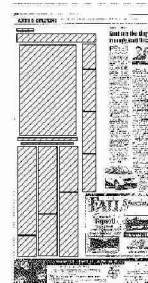
“We have a certain style of carrying and moving through space joined or connected in some way — that is something people will recognize in our work,” Tracy said.

### If you go

**What:** Pilobolus, modern dance troupe, beginning the seventh annual Firstworks Festival in Providence.

**When:** 8 tonight.

**Where:** Providence Performing Arts Center, 220



Weybosset St.,  
Providence.  
**Cost:** Tickets start  
at \$28, visit  
**www.ppacri.org**  
or call **(401) 421-  
ARTS.**

**What:** FirstWorks:  
A celebration of  
dance, theater,  
music, new media  
and visual arts  
premieres, special  
events, artist resi-  
dencies and free  
exhibits.

**When:** Festival  
begins tonight and  
runs through  
Nov. 13.

**Information and  
schedule:** visit  
**first-works.org**

**FEATURING:**

**Sunday:** Aurea  
The Search: A  
soundscape of  
Music, Words and  
Imagery.

**Sept. 30-Oct. 10:**  
Pixilerations, New  
Media Fringe  
Festival.

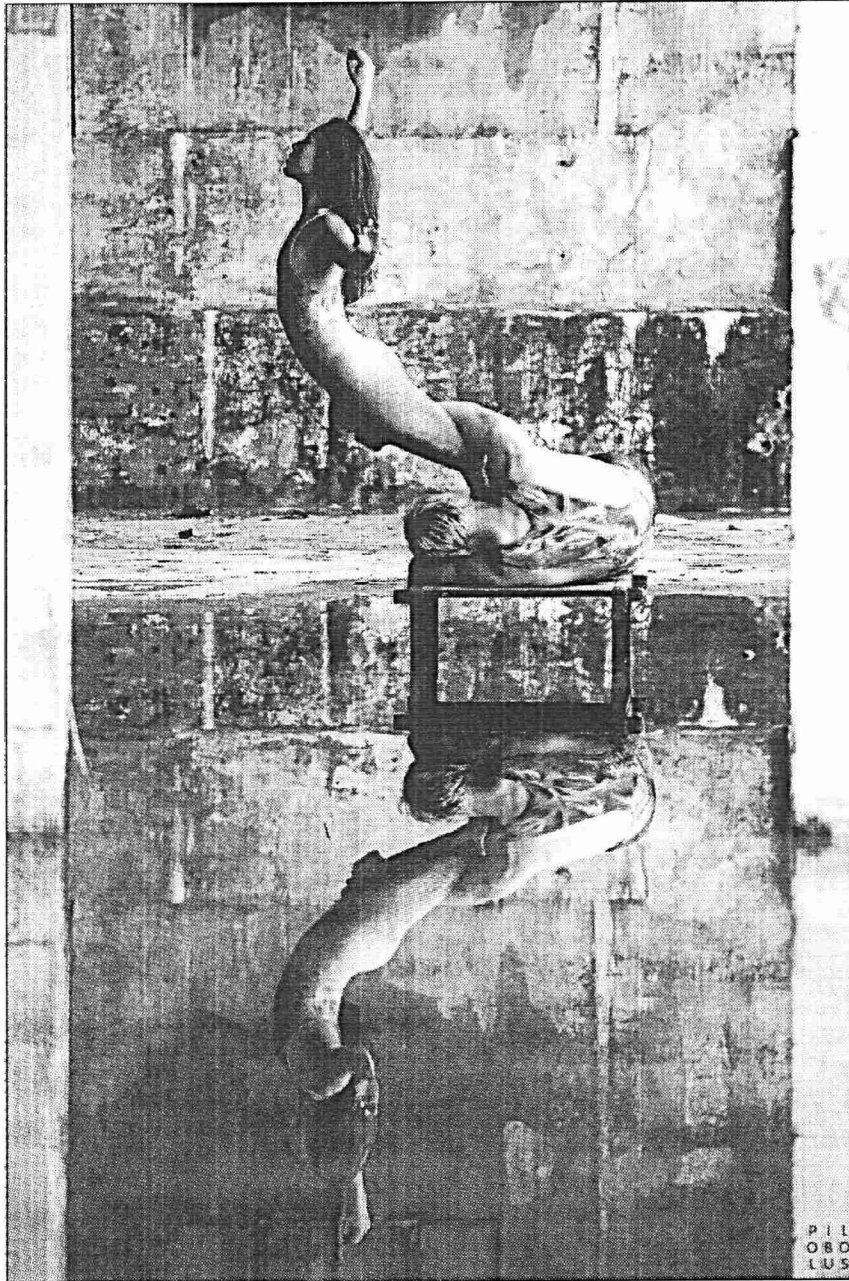
**Oct. 3:** Ibex  
Puppetry, Panther  
and Crane: A  
Mythic Journey  
Through Our  
Earth's Waterways,  
brought by  
Heather Henson.

**Oct. 14-16:**  
Lostwax  
Productions,  
Blinking: A Visual  
Interplay of Dance

and New Media.  
**Oct. 22-23:** The  
Journey Out:  
Stories of love,  
faith and courage.  
**Oct. 24:** La  
Excelencia, Taking  
Salsa Back to the  
Street.

**Oct. 29:** Gare St.  
Lazare Players.  
Ireland, First Love:  
A One-Man  
Triumph of Irish  
Theater.

**Oct. 30:**  
Christopher  
O'Riley, Out of  
My Hands:  
Classical Piano  
Meets Alternative  
Punk.



CONTRIBUTED

**Members of the dance troupe Pilobolus perform "Seaweed." Pilobolus will perform tonight in Providence.**