

CLEVELAND BALLET

STAGING *CODE OF SILENCE*: INSIGHTS WITH DAMEON NAGEL



WHAT MAKES *CODE OF SILENCE* SUCH A UNIQUE AND CHALLENGING BALLET FOR THE DANCERS?

Code of Silence is physically very demanding. There's a lot of twisting through the spine, and the lifts are intentionally off-balance, unconventional, and sometimes unpredictable. But beyond the technique, the real challenge is emotional. The dancers must bring pieces of their own humanity — their own experiences, their own vulnerability — into the movement. Without that, the ballet doesn't resonate.

Every gesture, every pause has to carry meaning, or the story loses its impact. It's a rare opportunity for dancers to combine technical skill with raw, emotional honesty.

YOU ORIGINALLY WORKED WITH CHOREOGRAPHER LYNNE TAYLOR-CORBETT ON THIS PIECE. HOW DOES THAT EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE YOUR APPROACH NOW?

I was involved back in 2008 when Lynne choreographed and workshopped the piece. Part of the ballet was already created, but there was a lot of room for collaboration and exploration.

Restaging it now is both an honor and a responsibility — it's a chance to keep her vision alive and introduce it to new audiences. Knowing her process and intentions helps guide every choice I make in rehearsal, from phrasing to subtle details in movement, so the emotional core of the piece is preserved.

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HOW DOES THE MUSIC SHAPE THE BALLET AND THE AUDIENCE'S EXPERIENCE, ESPECIALLY SINCE THERE ARE NO TRADITIONAL SETS?

The music is the heartbeat of the ballet — it pulls you in and carries the emotional story. *Code of Silence* runs about 25 minutes, and its arc is powerful. The first section is fragmented, like glimpses of fleeting memories; the second is lighter and more hopeful, with the women supporting the men, a moment of warmth and reflection; then the third pulls everything back into the darker, more chaotic emotions. Even without sets, the audience is fully immersed, guided by movement and sound.

WHY DID CLEVELAND BALLET CHOOSE TO PRESENT *CODE OF SILENCE* THIS SEASON?

Part of it is the timing — it's a dark, evocative ballet that fits beautifully with the Halloween season. But more importantly, it's a tribute to Lynne Taylor-Corbett, who passed away this year. Presenting this ballet allows audiences to experience her artistry and vision firsthand. It's a chance to honor her legacy while offering something powerful and unusual — a ballet that challenges, moves, and invites reflection.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE AUDIENCES TAKE AWAY FROM *CODE OF SILENCE*?

I hope each person leaves with their own personal reaction.

Some might feel moved by the beauty of the movement, some might reflect on the darker, more challenging emotions, and some might experience both. Every detail on stage — the way a dancer tilts their head, the placement of an arm, the timing of a step — shapes how the audience perceives the story.

If it's done right, it becomes a piece of art, like a painting or sculpture: everyone sees something different, and everyone experiences it deeply. My hope is that it leaves a lasting impression, something people carry with them long after the performance.