

## ARTS

# Discovering Noah's undercover passion

BY MIRIAM KORN

COFFEE, DANCE AND PHILOSOPHY. That's what comes to mind when I think of Gwen Noah. She is wonderful, right down to her red Reeboks.

I was treated to an interview with Noah last week as part of the

**DANCE**  
*Passion Undercover*  
The Church  
5657 North St.

publicity for her new work, *Passion Undercover*, premiering next Wednesday in The Church performance hall.

We both immediately recognized one another. Noah suggested that perhaps we had recently met at The Seahorse. Later, I realized our first meeting had actually been in the Mokka cafe, where I had been doing some paperwork over a hot chocolate. She had smiled, commenting that the pile of bills looked like a little sculpture.

"I love Gwen," said a friend when I told her of interview. "She taught me modern dance for two years."

Noah was born in Newfoundland, where she took classical ballet, and continued her studies in London, England, after high school. She then moved to Halifax, in 1981, working as a dance teacher. Eventually, in 1985, she began choreographing. "I was finding my niche." From 1988-90, she worked with the Julie West Dance Co. "That's when things started culminating. My dream started coming true."

Noah explained that it was by no means easy to continue to pursue her dream, for many people discouraged her along the way. Her confidence has taken time to evolve, including her ability to accept and utilize her body to its fullest potential. "I had to work on loving my body. It was a struggle, because the information around me said that I couldn't be a dancer."

**I combine such different elements: sensuality, toughness and strength**

"I am not the conventional dancer," affirmed Noah. "I am not pristine. I don't go to bed at eight o'clock." Indeed, this echoes the theme of her latest work which promises to "subvert the ballerina image."

The poster advertising the upcoming show depicts Noah in a white bustier and tutu. The photo had reminded me of Madonna. With its juxtaposition (I have always wanted to use that word) of classic femininity and bold, brash sexiness. She was surprised by this comparison, though by no means offended.

"I have been called 'Lifeforce' and 'the ultimate woman'. It's because I combine such different elements: sensuality, toughness and strength."

"I work a lot with kinetics, through the power of the woman, vulnerability, sensuality. Through composition, breath and movement I create an evening of dance."

The dance also "uses the power of kinetics to expose the passion of dance. 'I like to push movement to the point of exhaustion.'" explained Noah. "I find that I am happy as long as I'm tired. That way, I'm not carrying tension."

Noah explained that the key to modern dance is improvisation whereby the ability to move in the moment, not being conscious of the next moment, is essential.

"Vulnerability is what it's all about. In order to share yourself you have to bare your whole being. So, the movement ends up doing you, you are not doing the movement. That's where the freedom comes from. It's like a wave. You're not in control of it... like surfing."

After our chat, we shared some "girl talk" as we went off on an excursion to find a final copy of her press release. Appropriately, her Madonna tape bopped happily from the car stereo.

En route, we picked up Gordon Laurin, one of her musical collaborators. They babbled about the show, various mutual acquaintances and the copious philosophizing of the morning's interview. Gwen beeped at an actor friend crossing Gottingen Street. We dropped off Gordon at the O O gallery and continued to Gwen's home.

Noah is not just a marvellous body, she is a vibrant soul. I knew this the moment I met her, and it was confirmed when I walked through the door of her little apartment. It rang of simplicity and truth.

The futon was unmade, strewn with a tangled red and white patchwork quilt. A bright coral-red sheet was thrown over a loveseat which sat happily under an abstract pictures made from countless colours Gwen's



"Passion Undercover," Gwen Noah

PHOTO: GEORGE STEEVERS

own masterpiece. A sculpture of David, by Michaelangelo, stood on a coffee table, complementing and contemplating the scene.

Meanwhile, Gwen looked for the required documents among the numerous files in her red shelves. I liked the basket of shoes nearby.

After obtaining the copy of the press release, we parted, wishing each other luck with whatever we encountered until we met again.

That evening, I found Gwen sitting on the Dance Association steps as I strolled down Spring Garden Road. She was hanging out, enjoying a smoke as she recuperated from her hectic day of interviews, rehearsing, administrating and teaching.

Dean Brousseau arrived to pick up a set of keys. He was the other musical "collaborator." I was getting to know the whole family. Gwen gave him a heart-felt hug before allowing him depart.

Eager to tell me of her day, we scampered off to a nearby cafe, where Gwen had her coffee and I was treated to a hot chocolate. She recalled the events of her busy day and we talked some more about her approach to her art, which is her life.

"Timing is the key. You have to balance movement, pause and suspension. It's like daily life. Sometimes you feel like going fast, sometimes you need to take it easy."

I have had a glimpse of Gwen's daily routine. Now, I can't wait to see her dance.

*Passion Undercover* will run for three nights on November 27th, 28th, and 29th at 8pm at The Church Performance Hall, 5657 North St. Tickets are \$12 for Adults, \$10 for Students/Seniors and are available in advance at Halifax Dance, 5435 Spring Garden at the door.