

## N.Y. WORK

## 'Utah . . .' production has solid Beehive State roots

By Scott Iwasaki  
Deseret News dance writer

Choreographer Maida Rust Withers knows the beauty and landscapes of Utah.

"I was born in Kanab," said Withers during a phone call from George Washington University in Washington, D.C. "I was the youngest of eight children. I am also a sixth-generation pioneer descendent, and I know the state's history."

The artistic director of Washington, D.C.'s, Dance Construction Company choreographed, conceived and staged the multimedia dance production "Utah: Spirit Place, Spirit Planet, Tumuhikivatu," one of the major dance works commissioned by the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts especially for the Lincoln Out-of-Doors Festival that will run until Sept. 5 in New York City.

This year's theme is "Brave New Worlds," in celebration of the art and artists of North America—Mexico, Canada and the Caribbean.

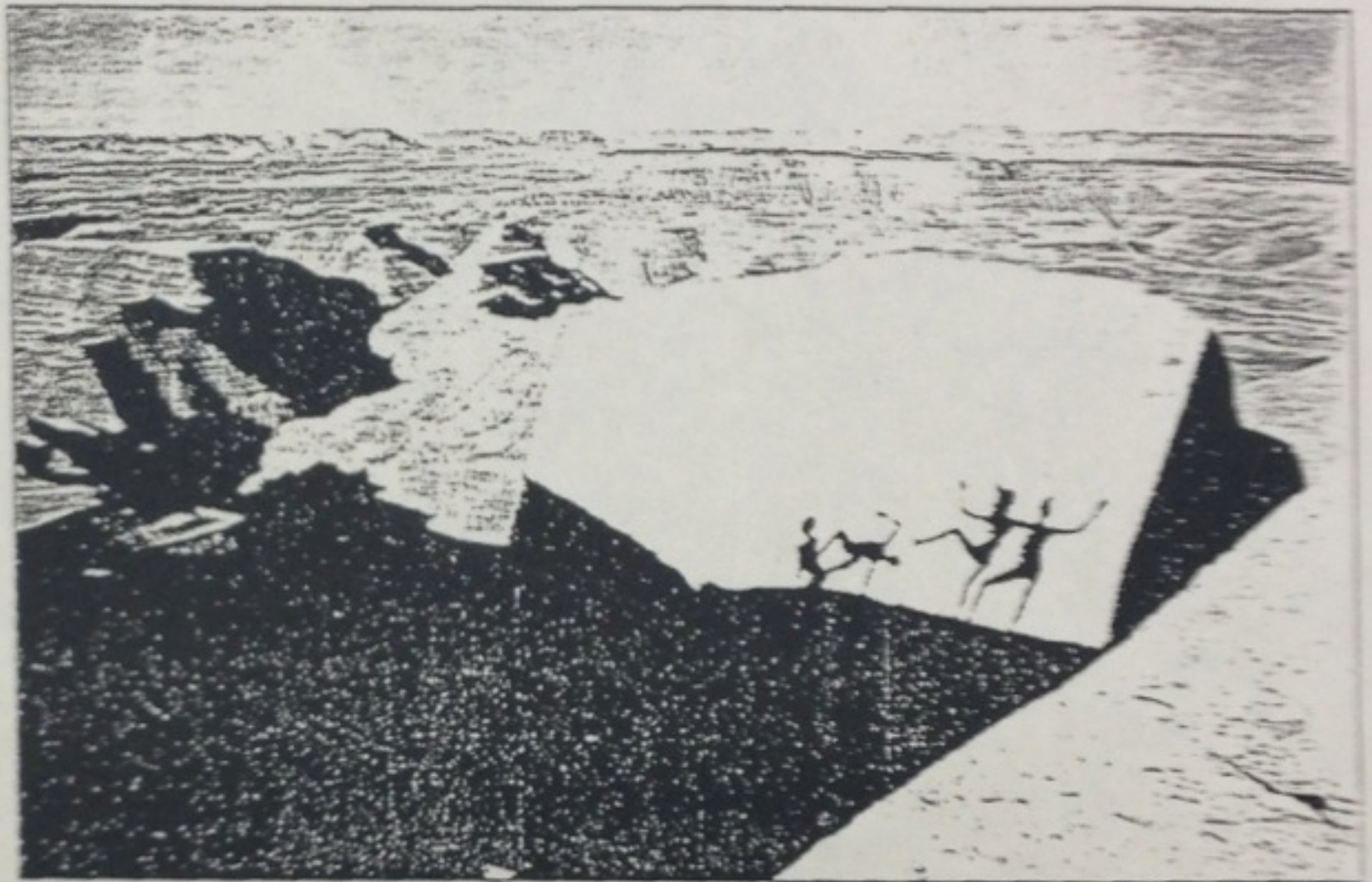
Withers' work will premiere Tuesday, Aug. 20.

"Some of the most beautiful scenery in the world can be found in Utah," said Withers, who is also a professor of theater and dance. "But I wanted to do much more than re-create those mountains, monuments and deserts. I wanted to bring in the ancient spirit of the original residents and mix that with the pioneer and contemporary spirit of the area. I wanted to connect all those aspects of Utah together in one tight package."

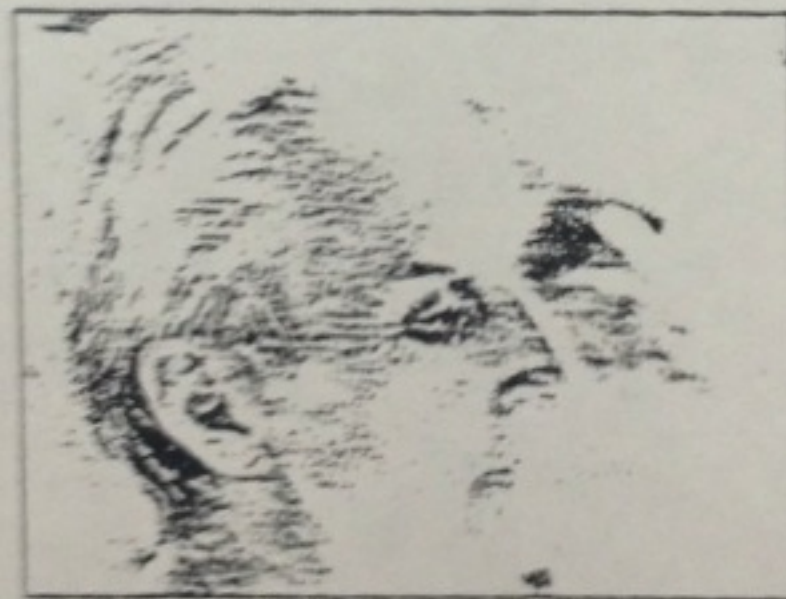
The journey to find the foundation of "Utah" actually began when Withers returned to Kanab in 1987 to do some dance experiments on the red sands and bluffs.

"It really didn't start off as a project," Withers, 50, said. "I was at a conflict of what I wanted to do in my next work. My own experiments led me to earth consciousness and its relationship to me. I got in tune with the natural elements of water, sun, wind and sky. It was very primal, and the next step I took was to expand these thoughts into a global frame of mind."

As things began to roll, Withers decided she wanted to discover her own history. And where else could she turn? Back to Utah, of course. Rock art, cliff art, shadows and historical events



Maida Withers' multimedia dance production features Utah's Muley Point.



Maida Withers

brought images to Withers' mind.

"I finally realized I wanted to bring the history of Utah to the stage," she said.

"Utah . . ." is choreographed with abstract expressions that combine formal traditions and contemporary aesthetics, said Withers. "From

the ancient origins to modern-day ideals are all combined through dance, video images, moving sets and slides."

NASA and KUED provided most of the footage that will be projected onto the backdrops. And while the dancers are moving on stage, some of the pictographs and petroglyphs will be projected directly onto them, said Withers.

"It's a huge production," she said. "But I wanted to show how massive Utah is. I also wanted to do something that ties in with Utah's centennial," said Withers. "This isn't an official centennial piece, but it comes at the right time."

Dancers sport body paint and move in exaggerated angles to bring to life images that are based on rock art. Messenger Eagle/Angel, Light Being, Darkness, Water, Spider Woman, Warrior, Trickster and Wisdom are a few of the characters that will take the stage.

Original music, composed by Brent Michael Davis, will embrace ethnic and contemporary sounds that will include drums, horns, cellos, guitar, vocal music and natural sound samples.