



“16: S W E E T and salty,” an immersive celebration for dropshift dance at Colvin House

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By Maureen Janson

When a dancemaker places their work within a particular architectural space as opposed to a traditional theater, they immediately become a collaborator with the space. And when that space is of historical significance, the work becomes simultaneously linked with the past. That spirit of collaboration and sense of historical connection is exactly what Andrea Cerniglia and her company, dropshift dance have thrived upon and how they plan to mark the milestone of their 16th season.

dropshift has grown from presenting solo dance works to crafting immersive environments. Collaborations with video artists, textile artists and composers have become the norm, while movement and dance remain anchors of the work. Bridging the now with architectural history a la Gilded Age in a one-night-only festive birthday celebration for dropshift, Cerniglia plans to present video installations and live performances along with a few surprises scattered throughout the stately Colvin House. “16: S W E E T & salty,” as the evening is titled, explores the idea of contrast, drawing from memory as inspiration for movement development.



dropshift dance presents “16: S W E E T and salty” at Colvin House May 17; photo collage by Lindsey Fisher

“Sixteen years ago, I was dancing as part of other people’s visions,” says Cerniglia. “I had ideas of my own about arranging spaces and creating environments and a desire to bring artists together.” A series of short solo works featuring four dancers became dropshift’s first performance season at Holstein Park in 2010. Since then, Cerniglia says her work has become less performative and more provocative, focused on deepening artistic explorations and maintaining collaborations. “Our artistic process always involves adapting to limits: space, architecture, or imposed structures,” says Cerniglia. “Everything I do is kind of an echo of an echo of an echo, so the new work is always talking back to what I’ve done before.”

Cerniglia feels that the company reached new heights with the 2024 performance entitled, “Rooms,” marking the first dropshift endeavor at Colvin House. “Rooms felt like a beautiful way to bring people together,” Cerniglia says. The success of “Rooms” triggered her to envision new ways of using the historic home and prompted this return engagement.

The plan for “16” is to immerse guests (Cerniglia does not call them audience members) in a casual atmosphere, while celebrating dropshift’s unique artistic vision. Guests will experience the 1909-built Colvin House—one of only 20 mansion-sized homes in Chicago to have landmark protection. Food and drink will be available, and attendees are free to wander the 6000-square-foot estate. “We have access to the whole house and will be screening four video essays in various spaces simultaneously,” she says. “If weather cooperates, the beautiful outdoor courtyard space will be available as well.” But the ornate first floor and parlor will be the location of the bulk of action, including two dance pieces performed by dropshift dancers.



dropshift dance: Ali Claiborne-Naranjo (foreground) and Christina Chammas and Andrea Cerniglia (background); Photo by Roberto Martinez

In “Quilted P{a}Lace” Cerniglia’s new solo springboards from memories of place and time in a series of movement segments, connected by improvisation. “I use a phrase that I created in 2017 that has been a part of a few different works since,” says Cerniglia. “There is an arc that occurs, but it’s a little different each time I do it.” Driving that sense of memory and echo, collaborator, Shi-An Costello accompanies the solo with a mix of recorded tracks and live prepared piano. Costello uses the word “translation” to describe his method of composing music using archival and recorded sounds as the ignition for generating new soundscapes.



Fabrics designed by Collin Bunting: Photo by Roberto Martinez

Also on the program is a trio excerpt from “bloom,” which premiered at Links Hall in 2023. “Sense Series: Sampling of bloom” features vibrant, whimsical fabric pieces designed by Collin Bunting. This wild and unpredictable improvisation is made unique as dancers interact with the interior architecture of the site and perform to varied vantage points—people are welcome to sit, stand or lean against a wall. Cerniglia is joined by dancers Christina Chammas and Ali Claiborne-Naranjo, who manipulate Bunting’s large, colorful textiles to cover, drape and catapult each other.

Four different video essays created for this event feature conversations between Cerniglia and collaborators from past and present. Longtime dropshift collaborator, video artist, Andrew Henke, created a cross between documentary and dance video by combining archival footage of past works with current day observation and dialog. “We will have two

episodes screening in the salon,” Cerniglia says, “and we built a screen for video projection that sits in one of the main windows of the space.” Another video essay will screen in the basement, projecting onto a brick wall.



dropshift dance, with Andrea Cerniglia (fabric by Collin Bunting) at Colvin House; Photo by Roberto Martinez

Anne Kasdorf, a company dancer from the original iteration of dropshift, returns for one of two on-the-spot solo dances, the other to be performed by Julie Brannen, a dropshift member from 2013-2015. “If people happen to catch them, they catch them,” says Cerniglia, but these two pop-up solos won’t be formally noted on the program.

“We’ll have a small gallery on the landing above the beautiful foyer staircase,” Cerniglia says, “featuring objects that have been integrated into past works. Set pieces, print marketing materials and other items will be on display for people to see and touch.” An informal atmosphere and loose agenda allow attendees to explore the house and decide how and where they will experience the works. “And there will be cake!” says Cerniglia. “I hope that the whole event will feel like a party and that audiences will absorb a bit of our history and be able to connect with it in some way.”

dropshift dance presents “16: S W E E T & salty” on May 17 at Colvin House, 5940 N Sheridan Road. Doors open at 6pm. Performances begin at 6:30pm. For more information, check out the event page by clicking [HERE](#).