

THE BACKSTAGE BEAT.[®]

Push Dance Company at the Ferst Center Feb. 7-8

By [Amy Howton](#) on January 29, 2014

It's all about Sixes. Push Dance Company choreographer and artistic director Raissa Simpson is bringing six dancers to Georgia to perform six works at the Ferst Center for the Arts on Georgia Tech's campus February 7 and 8. Ms. Simpson describes the dances as varied in style and length, and she also talks about the dancers' skills and personalities as varied too. Describing her dancers as each having "a little piece of me," the choreographer says, "each person has a certain unique quality that works for me." Bitter Melon Press's Anastasia Pahules describes the company as "riveting and emotional, but also extremely thought-provoking." The choreographer describes her work as "raw and athletic."



The driving force behind the company is Raissa Simpson herself, a dancer who traces some of her family's roots to the South, and is excited to share her vision with Atlanta in what she calls a "kind of coming back home." The company got its name because dancers she worked with "pushed" Ms. Simpson into forming the company. She says originally, she made it for everybody else. But now, she comments that, "When you put [the artists] together, you have an image of who I am as a dancer."

Atlantans attending the performances will see dance works ranging from 5 minutes to 20 minutes long, and from hip-hop opera to multi-media pieces. Raissa Simpson emphasizes that she incorporates a lot of input from the artists she casts in the pieces, and considers the space in which the performance will take place. The company performs installations in non-traditional venues as well as on more traditional stages. The Ferst performance will be a mélange: the audience will be placed on the stage, morphing the traditional stage space into something unexpected. Investigating ways to do that will be on the to-do list when the company arrives in Atlanta and the final staging of the pieces begins. Ms. Simpson indicates she will change the works if necessary, focusing on their rebirth. "It's important to honor the space," she says. She wants her dancers to "create an imprint on the movement itself."

That movement is often quick, always dynamic, and gives the impression of springing from diverse origins. Raissa Simpson looks for relevant topics occurring today, and she says, "We're about telling untold stories." One of the pieces Atlanta audiences will see is about African-American hair—"about wishing you can wear it naturally without any social stigma." It addresses people who do things to fit in, and about being comfortable in your own skin. Ms. Simpson commented, "People are invited to laugh, but I hope they will see the seriousness if you're on the wrong side of that conversation."



She's eager to stretch herself as a choreographer, too. A recent piece is a men's trio about manhood, which she finds to be a challenging topic for a female choreographer.

"Push Dance Company is excited to share with Atlanta all the elements we've been sharing with the rest of the country," the choreographer says. This company has a "young, vigorous voice." They're eager, and they're excited. When you come to see what the sixes are all about, expect to see movement that requires the full body, from the core to the fingertips. Don't blink, or you'll miss something, and it will be something astonishing.

For more information or to order tickets, visit

<http://www.ferstcenter.gatech.edu/plugins/shows/index.php?id=558> or call the Ferst Center Box Office at 404-894-9600.