

FARM TO BALLET PROJECT

Celebrating Farming on the Agricultural Stage by Sara Widness



Cows let out to pasture for the first time in the spring prance and frolic on Nature's stage, a celebration of life before settling down to grazing. Farmers pay attention to this dance signaling longer days and that the first cutting of hay or silage is coming up.

On this year's warm-weather calendar another kind of dance, also a celebration of life, is being staged in agricultural settings around Vermont. Farmers may well want to make the effort to enjoy one or more of these celebrations. Why? Because you who till the soil and produce food for the rest of us will have a chance to see in action, concerns others share with you: about Earth, about the soil, about the future of agriculture, about our communities, and about our food chain.

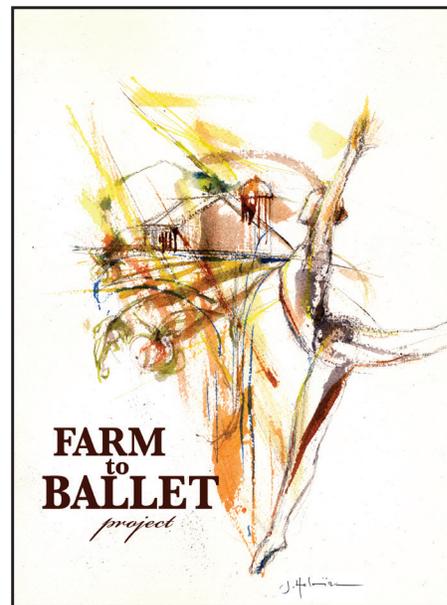
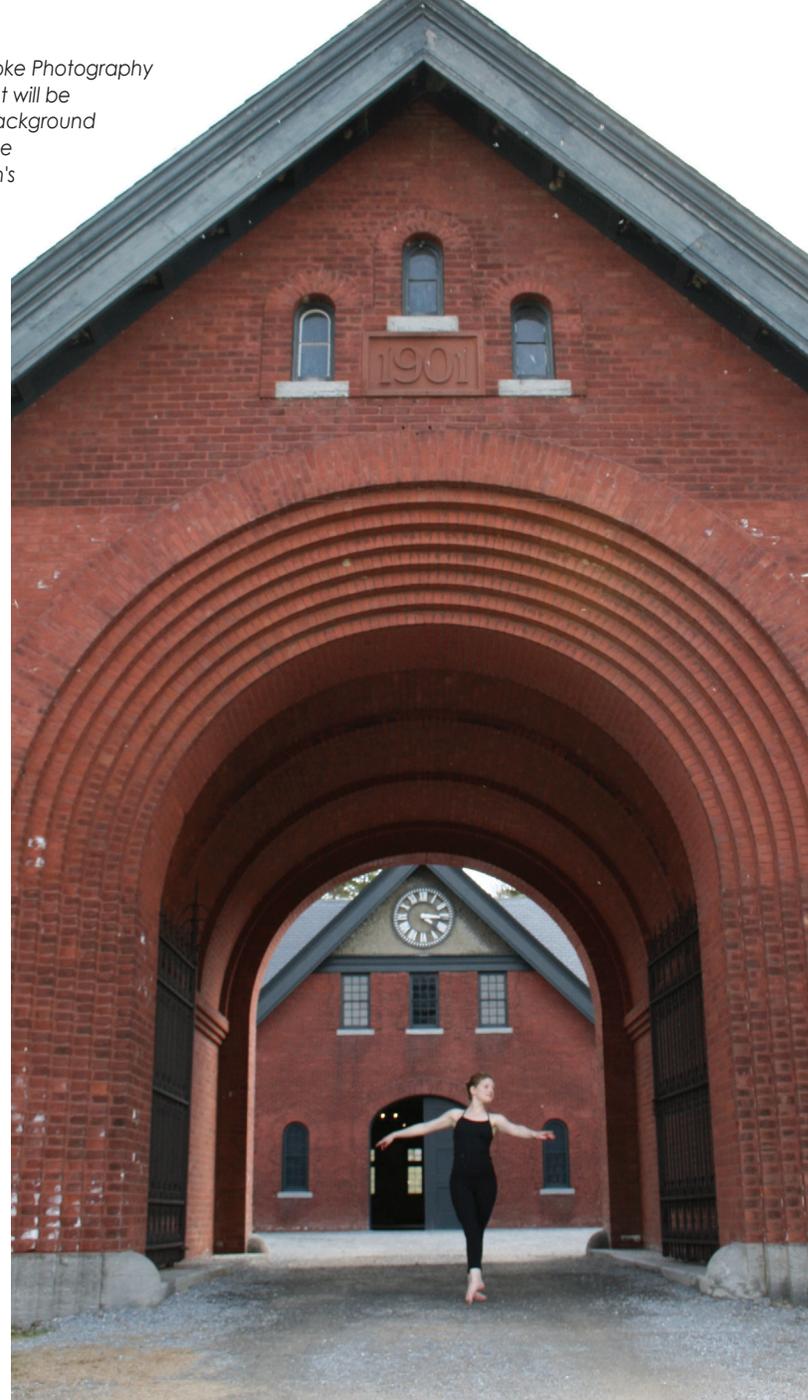
Six events are scheduled. Most are fund-raisers for non-profits. One event will help support the Vermont Land Trust's Farmland Access Program that provides farmers with opportunities to purchase or lease affordable farmland so

they can start up or expand agricultural businesses.

The programs that begin Aug. 1 in Dorset and conclude Aug. 23 in Essex are called Farm to Ballet. Eighteen women who study ballet under Chatch Pregger in a studio in Burlington are volunteering their time for these performances. Two musicians will perform excerpts from Vivaldi. A full-length production of up to 75 minutes will be performed six times around the state, reinterpreting classical ballet choreography to tell the story of a Vermont farm from spring to fall.

Some will recognize the music, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* and the ballet *Giselle*. Everyone will have a brand-new experience seeing dancers become apple trees blowing in the wind, or through dance miming to music, lettuces and tomatoes growing in a garden. This is farm life seen through a different kind of lens: dance. For example, wild geese returning in the spring are dancers imbued with the spirit of the music of *Swan Lake*.

Left to Right: Photo of Megan Stearns and Josie the cow by Joey Jones of Photospoke Photography helped the Farm to Ballet Project with their promotional photography. Farm to Ballet will be performed at Shelburne Farms on August 4 with a view of Lake Champlain in the background and will tell the story of a Vermont farm from spring to fall. Lindsey Slan Halman in the entrance to the coach barn at Shelburne Farms. She has been a student of Chatch's since 2008 and is part of the planning team for the Farm to Ballet Project since the initial planning stages. She is a middle school educator at Essex Middle School and co-creator of The Edge Academy.



Lindsey and Charles (Chatch) Pregger on-site at Shelburne Farms. The Farm to Ballet Project artwork and logo by Jacquelyn Heloise. Chatch choreographed the dance to be a glimpse of farm life through a different kind of lens. It's intended to give viewers a brand-new experience seeing dancers become apple trees blowing in the wind, or through dance miming to music, lettuces and tomatoes growing in a garden. The dancers are all volunteers and have been practicing under Chatch's guidance for the last year. One of his goals is to show how ballet is accessible to everyone and to benefit agricultural producers at the same time.



The Von Gal Farm in Essex where dairy farmer Paul de la Bruere keeps his cows during the summer months will be the last scheduled performance on August 23. All six acts are scheduled to be performed outdoors rain or shine. The Coach Barn at Shelburne Farms does have a rain plan.

Among the dancers are those with extensive ballet training but whose careers now include education, massage therapy, epidemiology, communications, and farming. In addition to volunteering their time for rehearsals and performances, some dancers are helping make these productions happen by lending support to fund-raising, scheduling, research, publicity, prop and logo design, and merchandise production.

Audiences will be asked to bring imagination each evening. But this is something farmers are well used to—they have to imagine every spring that the seeds they plant today will be harvested weeks hence. Without that imagination, why would they plant in the first place?

So, too, is Chatch bringing imagination through his dancers to the land, planting seeds on these evenings sprinkled by way of ballet, opening the way for farmers over time to reap benefits from the donations that come in to the Vermont Land Trust or to Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL).

Chatch promises that these evenings of ballet he has choreographed will be anything but aloof and unapproachable. "Through the Farm to Ballet Project I am thrilled to have found a way to collaborate with other artists as well as food producers and show how ballet is accessible to everyone."

One stage is in Barnard where farms and businesses are working together as Feast and Field Market at Heartwood Fable Collective. They affiliate with the Vermont Land Trust for long-

term stewardship of the former Clark Farm. This collective harvests produce and dairy products from over 200 acres, engaging 16 people at the weekly market where upwards of 200 people congregate to purchase, eat, listen to music, and sometimes to dance. With one of two churches shuttered in this hamlet and the other open for only a few weeks each summer, this weekly gathering is as close to an old-fashioned



Megan Stearns in a group of Jerseys. Photo by Joey Jones of Photospoke Photography.



Katie Decker takes direction from Chatch during a rehearsal. As the coordinator of the Farm to Ballet Project, she communicates with the dancers, manages the funding, coordinates the shows, purchase the costumes, manages the website and facebook page and dances in the project! She got involved with the planning and coordinating because she really wanted to help make Chatch's vision a reality. Katie is also Director of Centerpoint School.

Sunday school picnic as you'll find around here.

When Barnard's Chris Piana, a main player in the collective, heard that a group out of Burlington calling itself Farm to Ballet was looking for performance sites and would offer an evening here at no cost, his team jumped on the opportunity.

"Sharing time and resources, we are developing a model that works for the farmers, the community, and the landscape," said Chloe Powell, event coordinator for Farm to Feast. When Farm to Ballet comes to Barnard, audiences will be supporting a fundraiser to help with the costs of running the weekly farmer's market and arts venue.

Carol Tashie farms at her Radical Roots Farm in Rutland. She is also on the staff of RAFFL. "Our reason for being exists in looking for new ways to support the community general and to learn more about local foods and local farms," she said. "We have a fairly wide reach to people who traditionally support local food and farms. When Farm to Ballet contacted RAFFL about doing an event, we thought what a wonderful opportunity to reach out to a new com-

Dancers performing the Apple Tree Dance.



Calendar

June 4-7 – Vermont Dairy Festival, Enosburg Falls

Rain or shine cows and dairy farmers go about their business so do we. Dress accordingly. www.vermontdairyfestival.com.

June 5-7 – Strolling of the Heifers, Brattleboro

A festival where people meet farmers and learn about local foods. www.strollingoftheheifers.com.

June 12-14 – Vt-4H Horse clinic, Tunbridge

At the Tunbridge Fairgrounds. www.tunbridgeworldsfair.com

July 13-14 – Vt-4H Dairy Clinic, Tunbridge

At the Tunbridge Fairgrounds. www.tunbridgeworldsfair.com

July 16-19 – Connecticut Valley Fair, Bradford

Tractor pull, Oxen pull, Dairy Fitting & Showmanship, Midway rides and entertainment. www.bradfordfair.org.

July 18 – Monument Farms 85th Anniversary Celebration, Weybridge

Live music, antique tractor parade, free food and creamies, tours, etc... Call 802-545-2119 or email Jon Rooney roo_mfd@gmavt.net.

July 24-26 – Lamoille County Field Days, Hyde Park

Lamoille County Farm Bureau building welcomes you to visit the Ice cream scoop shop, UVM Extension Farm Safety and Nationwide Insurance information. www.lamoillefelddays.com.

July 30-Aug 2 – Franklin County Field Days, Highgate

A true country fair, admission price includes all midway rides, exhibits, and entertainment. www.franklincountyfelddays.org.

August - Vermont Farm Bureau Picnic and Board Meeting

Date and time TBD. Check www.vtfb.org or call 802-434-5646.

August 1 – Farm to Ballet at the Marble House Project, Dorset

Celebrating Vermont farmers performances throughout Vermont during August. For a schedule www.farmtoballet.org

August 4-8 – Addison County Fair & Field Days, New Haven

Vermont's largest agricultural fair. Children's barnyard, cattle judging, tractor pulls & more. www.addisoncountyfelddays.com

August 19-23 – Orleans County Fair, Barton

Since 1867 locals and farmers have been celebrating this annual County Fair, www.orleanscountyfair.net.

August 22 – Vermont Breakfast on the Farm, Ferrisburgh

Neatocht Farm 9am-1pm. Free event! Tickets available in July. Call 802-828-2430 or visit www.vermontbreakfastonthefarm.com

Aug. 20- 3 – Deerfield Valley Farmers' Day Fair, Wilmington

Education in agriculture, wholesome entertainment, exhibits of area residents, and more. Visit www.dvfair.com.

August 26-30 – Caledonia County Fair, Lyndonville

Truck, Tractor, Oxen and Horse Pulls Horse, Poultry, Cattle, Sheep Shows, displays and more. Visit www.caledoniacountyfair.com.

August 28-30 – The Bondville Fair, Bondville

The oldest continuous fair in Vermont. Visit www.bondvillefair.org.

August 28-Sept 6 – The Champlain Valley Fair, Essex Junction

Agricultural exhibits, antique tractor pulls, live entertainment, ox and horse pulling, and more. Visit www.champlainvalleyfair.org.

September 17-20 – The Tunbridge World's Fair, Tunbridge

Celebrating the tradition of Harness racing since Day 1 on the fairgrounds. Visit www.tunbridgeworldsfair.com

October 3-4 – Vermont Sheep and Wool Festival, Tunbridge

Shepherd Workshops, Fleece show & sale, Fiber arts contests, Cashmere goat exhibit & Show Visit www.vtshoopandwoolfest.org.

November 5-7 – Vermont Farm Bureau 100th Annual Meeting

Jay Peak Resort, Jay, VT. In celebration of our Centennial status this a three day celebration. Special room rates for attendees. Trade show and sponsorship opportunities available. Contact Chris O'Keefe at okeefe@gmavt.net or call 802-434-5646.



The Pregger family: Sam, Chatch, Kim, and Zinnia.

munity of people—of dancers and dance enthusiasts.”

For RAFFL an evening at Green Mountain College will help underscore the value, importance, and wonder of local food to farm initiatives. For Chatch, who is the spirit and imagination behind Farm to Ballet, the evening will bring him close to his roots, as he grew up in nearby Fair Haven. His Vermont Farm Bureau membership is further testament of his support for the agricultural community.

When it comes to integrating art into the landscape, Shelburne Farms in Shelburne is a natural fit, said Vera Chang, Public Relations and Marketing Director. “We use our entire working landscape as a campus for learning.

Everything serves for production and education.” The event here will include seasonal farm-to-table food produced here.

“The way we engage with the working landscape is a beautiful thing. Why not celebrate it?” underscored Tre McCarney, events coordinator for the 1,400-acre farm, a National Historic Landmark on Lake Champlain.

For those interested in working with this program through promotions or advertisements, please contact the website for details www.FarmtoBallet.org. ■

Farm to Ballet Performance Schedule

Aug 1 – Dorset, Marble House Project 6:15 pm

Wine and cheese reception.

Aug 4 – Shelburne, Shelburne Farms Coach Barn 6:15 pm

Gates open at 5 pm with farm-to-table fare available.

Aug 15 – Charlotte, Philo Ridge Farm 6 pm

Aug 16 – Poultney, Green Mountain College: time TBA.

Aug 22 – Barnard, Feast and Field Market at Heartwood

Fable Collective (Clark Farm) 6 pm. Doors open at 4 pm.

Aug 23 – Essex, Von Gal Farm 6 pm

Doors open at 5 pm Food available. Tickets are \$20.

This is a fundraiser for Farm to Ballet and a scholarship program for dancers at Spotlight Vermont that offers education in the performing arts. Reception with dancers after the show.

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