

## A HANDHELD DANCE STUDIO

**The Dances for an iPhone application presents choreographed pieces by top performers.**

By GIA KOURLAS  
The New York Times

Dances for an iPhone began the way most dances don't: with an injury.

But Richard Daniels, who at various times has worked as an arts administrator, a producer and a choreographer, was incapacitated and recovering from shoulder surgery in 2008 when the idea was born.

"About all I could do was look at the computer," he said. "I had always been choreographing, and videotaped every rehearsal in preparation for my shows. There was something on those rehearsal tapes that I found really compelling. I manipulated some footage on the computer, and I thought, 'Could I move it to the phone?'"

As a result, he created Dances for an iPhone, an application that has been available free through iTunes since the beginning of this year. It's starkly elegant; its developer, Samuel Toulouse, also created an application for Chanel. The first volume features six modern dances, ranging from 2 to 5 minutes, performed by an accomplished bunch: Carmen de Lavallade, Deborah Jowitz, Regina Larkin, Christine Redpath and Megan Williams.

It's a far cry from Angry Birds. Unlike Dances for an iPhone, which features original content created specifically for the small screen, much of the dance material found on the Internet consists of existing work. (Daniels' dances can be viewed in their entirety on the iPad as well.)

There's also TenduTV, which features dance programming for rental or purchase through a variety of digital sources, including iTunes, Hulu and Amazon Instant Video. It recently released Alexei Ratmansky's "Don Quichot," choreographed for the Dutch National Ballet.

But Daniels' video dances, purposely bare bones, are works of art in themselves. His intimate portraits, mainly in solo form, are more about the dancer than the choreographer. Daniels, who favors practice clothes and natural light, keeps his pieces refreshingly simple. Watching Williams skip and glide along a path while she performs a series of effervescent jumps is like holding a dance in the palm of your hand.

Daniels, a Shawnee Mission East grad who attended the University of Kansas and the Conservatory of Music and Dance at UMKC, said the small scale is what provides such an intimate vantage point.

"I've come to the conclusion that you



FILE PHOTO

Dancer Miki Orihara will be featured in Vol. 2 of Dances for an iPhone.

have to see it on the phone, or you don't really know what it is. I've been watching a lot of dance all of my life, and some of the most extraordinary moments happen in the studio when nobody's really there. So maybe there are aspects of this that even give you a glimpse into the process of dance and dance making."

The maturity and individual spark of his subjects help.

"If I'm working with these people who come in already with so much in their bodies, I'm not just thinking about a movement language," he said. "It's almost putting dance in the service of something else. I'm looking at another way of using dance."

De Lavallade, performing to "Children and Art" from Stephen Sondheim's "Sunday in the Park With George," likens the

piece to a movement soliloquy.

"I always think that solos are rather like soliloquies, but particularly when you're dealing with text," she said.

In the work de Lavallade starts with her back to the viewer. Gradually facing front, she lets her arms drift from her body like elegant tentacles that send her swaying in space. It's almost as if the choreography is flowing from her hands.

"In that particular piece, the hands are kind of like an extension of your soul," she said. "There are times when it explodes and it moves, and there are other times when there is a lot of air in it and stillness. I love working like that. The movement isn't just all one color."

For Daniels, part of the point of Dances for an iPhone is showing a different side of dance from what the public sees on

shows like "So You Think You Can Dance?"

"I remember being inspired by the Ives piece of Jerome Robbins," he said, referring to "Ives, Songs," a ballet from 1988. "The male lead basically just walks around the stage. That was a revelation for me. I think at the very least I can just have somebody walk, and it can be beautiful. And it takes artistry to do that."

Dances for an iPhone is the convergence of many events in Daniels' life. While earning a photography degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, he also began to study modern dance. He pursued a career until around 1980, working with mainly minor choreographers. In 1992, after his partner learned he was HIV-positive — he died two years later — Daniels returned to dance. He recalled: "I thought: 'Are you going to do it or not? I might as well try something creative. Would you like to die without having tried?'"

That is certainly a concern for Daniels, who, soon to be 60, is also living with the disease. (His health, he said, is stable.)

"When my partner died, they said, 'Maybe if we can keep you around for five years, we'll have something,'" he said. "Once I made a piece called 'Bonus Round,' which was really all about living on borrowed time. I still feel like this is somehow extra out of the realm of probability."

Dances for an iPhone is also about creating a legacy, not just for himself but for the dancers he so admires. So far it has been downloaded more than 2,075 times in 49 countries, and this month Daniels will begin work on a new duet for Rebecca Rigert and Brian McGinnis.

He also has ideas for several more installments. In the fall he will release Vol. 2, featuring Margie Gillis, Stephen Pier and Miki Orihara, Risa Steinberg, Melissa Fenley and Christine Wright (in a preview performance for another installment). The third volume will be an all-Stravinsky suite and will include dances for Jason McDole, David Leventhal and Barbara Mahler.

Rigert, who has known Daniels for years, said what she liked most about the project was how it gave her a sense of someone's private moment of dancing.

"There's a sense of, you pull out your iPhone and there's this beautiful little jewel of art right in front of you with no big bells and whistles," she said. "Look, we all have these crazy lives, especially in New York. We're running around, we pull out our phone for communication and technology, and yet you can also pull out the phone and take 5 minutes to have this moment. It's as though you're sitting in the middle of a beautiful park. And then you go back to your day."

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