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ECDC Flows Into National Water Dance

Lucy Gellman | April 16th, 2018

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National Water Dance

from **Elm City Dance Collective**

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At first, it wasn't clear what Alicia White was doing on a rock at Lighthouse Point Park. The wind had picked up, blowing her ponytail off of her neck. Her

eyes were locked on the water, looking out all the way to the horizon line. Behind her, a loose crowd had gathered in the sand and around the cement base of the lighthouse.

A violin sounded from somewhere in the back of the group, one long note blooming into two, then three, then four. White threw herself forward and snapped back. Around her, a whole orchestra of bodies began to vibrate, snap and sway at once, lurching forward and then back before they headed for one side of the park's lighthouse.



Saturday at 4 p.m. sharp, members of the [Elm City Dance Collective](#) (ECDC) and the New Haven public came together as part of the fourth annual [National Water Dance](#), a nationwide event intended to bring attention to [climate change](#), access to [clean drinking water](#), health of marine life, and [water contamination](#). Different versions of the dance were performed by companies across the country at the same time.

This year marks the first time ECDC has participated in the dance, which was conceived in 2011 and then launched nationally in 2014.

“A lot of the work we do involves engaging community, and that comes in a variety of shapes and sizes,” said ECDC Artistic Director Kellie Ann Lynch. “I wanted us to be part of a larger idea, a larger effort ... this idea of a national movement choir to bring awareness to a particular subject matter—the fragility of our waters and what that means in different locations.”



She chose Lighthouse Point, she said, because it’s a central meeting point for New Haveners already. That was also the idea in opening up rehearsals to anyone who wanted to participate, which she did through an open call last month. Ultimately, she said around 15 New Haveners joined the dance.

Saturday, they began as one collective body, a barrage of billowy clothes whipping in the wind. Limbs extended then sharpened at right angles, oscillating as they lifted toward the sky.

They glided from the lighthouse to the beach below. Arms extended out from bodies, flapping in the wind like gulls in slow motion, or a rip tide pulled back, and played over and over again at half speed. A few bodies lay down and rolled

through the sand while others ran toward the low tide, feet nearly touching the water.

A strong breeze came off the sound, injecting everything with the smell of salt and seaweed. In its clutch, New Haven artist [Joe Fekieta](#) broke away from the group. “Follow me!” he cried, running along the sand. A few dancers ran in his direction. Then another voice chimed into the action.



“Follow me!” it cried. Another set of dancers broke away. A few began to form a line against a wall of tall grasses, arms in nearly constant motion. Close to 50 looked on, transfixed, from a rock above.

Dancers broke from the chain. At one end, Fekieta and Sarafina Robinson performed a sort of water-inspired duet, moving in concert with each other as they extended arms, swayed back and forth, froze and unfroze at sharp angles.

Not far from them, Lindsay Bauer and a community member broke from the line, windmilling their arms toward the sky. On another slice of beach, Anna Herforth reached out, eyes out ahead of her as her legs bent slowly.



A few sneakered feet slid and sunk in the cool sand. Then dancers headed, slowly and like something flowing to the sea, to the lighthouse.



Already, Lynch said she’s thinking about new, water specific locations like the Mill River for events down the line. Which is good news for some community members hoping this will become an annual tradition.

“For me personally, I live near the water for a reason—I always need to be connected to it,” said Giulia Gouge, one of the community dancers, after the event. “And I love dancing. This was the perfect fit in so many ways.”

“There we high school students, other dancers and movers,” she added. “And to do something so meaningful connected to other artists around the nation was quite a moving opportunity.”

Check out a small photo gallery from the event below. For our Facebook live video of the event, [click here.](#)













