



Special to The Herald-Sun | John Koch

Choreographer Vanessa Voskuil performs in this American Dance Festival file photo.

## ADF's 'Footprints' strolls down Gardens' paths

BY SUSAN BROILI  
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD-SUN

DURHAM American Dance Festival audiences will be able to stop and smell the roses before performances today and Saturday. That's because the performances will take place mostly around the fountain in the Mary Duke Biddle Rose Garden at the Sarah P. Duke Gardens.

This weekend's performances, part of this summer's American Dance Festival's Footprints programs, features the work "Walk" by Vanessa Voskuil,

performed by 16 ADF students and ADF music coordinator Andy Hasenpflug.

"I have for some time wanted to do a large group piece in the garden in solo format, which is what this will look like," Voskuil said.

"The solo format offers the performers some visibility as artists themselves inside a group format that runs off a mission statement made together at the start of the rehearsal process after we got to know each other," the choreographer added.

Voskuil and the students have been working on this

performance since the beginning of this ADF season.

"The heat and rain have been a working force and highly observed in everything we are considering for a performance of 45 minutes," Voskuil said.

Weather could also be a factor in whether a performance takes place. "If it is raining 30 minutes prior to the work being shown, the performance will be canceled," she added.

If the performance is a go, audience members should congregate at the Duke Gardens' main, gated entrance at 420 Anderson St., next to West Campus, and then follow dancers

into the performance space where audience members will be allowed to roam freely, the choreographer said.

Voskuil also spoke of the connection between her work and the garden.

"This work is about human development and the metaphor of the garden is ideal for this topic. It is about nature and what it means to be a part of the world ...

"Our growth is of our own doing and in the structuring of this work, I considered all aspects of individual growth ... Our process dealt similarly with our life processes and, internally, how they relate to our 'truest self' ... Each piece of this 'garden' (human soul) is equally unique to other 'gardens' (human souls), she explained.

This work is Voskuil's second participation in a "Footprints" program. In the 2013 Footprints, 16 ADF students performed Voskuil's "Gates" which began with performers walking backwards down Reynolds Industries Theater's steps to the stage and ended as performers fell into the orchestra pit.

Based in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, Voskuil has received many awards for her work. In 2015, awards included the \$25,000 McKnight Fellowship for Choreography and recognition by City Pages as "Best Dancer Minneapolis."

Besides performing and dance-making, her artistic interests include directing, designing and filmmaking.

Her road to performing had been rough. Born in 1977, she grew up in Bismarck, North Dakota.

"I never truly enjoyed performing in front of people," she recalled.

She had been terrified by her mother's encouragement to audition for summer theater. "I actually locked myself in a car once and refused to go in," Voskuil said.

"It was not easy for me to pursue performing. Generally, I enjoyed creating more. Sometimes, this involved myself as a performer and this was more enjoyable," she added.

Her parents encouraged her to explore art and served as role models.

"My mother pursued cello, saxophone and writing as a journalist focused on arts' commentary. She performed in a small contemporary modern dance company that focused on Isadora Duncan technique and other styles of working," Voskuil added. And, this had encouraged Voskuil to study Duncan's technique.

Her father was an architect and luthier (maker of stringed instruments) as well as a professor of theology, logic and ethics.

"Family was a big influence on me as a child," she added.

So, by the time she went to college, Voskuil knew just what she wanted to do. In 2001, she graduated with a B.F.A. in dance and a B.A. in theater from the University of Minnesota where she has since taught as a visiting artist.

### GO AND DO

**WHAT:** The American Dance Festival presents a Footprints program featuring a work by Vanessa Voskuil, "Walk," performed by ADF students.

**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Friday, July 29 and 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. Saturday, July 30.

**WHERE:** Sarah P. Duke Gardens.

**ADMISSION:** Free.