

P NORTHWEST PASSAGES

THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

OCTOBER 14, 2009 ■ PAGE 15

Choreographer investigates the 'in between' of American identity

By **TERESA G. GIONIS**
Current Correspondent

Dana Tai Soon Burgess, the Korean-American son of a scholar of Chinese history, grew up in the middle of a Hispanic community in Santa Fe, N.M. With such a rich cultural background, it is no surprise that as a dancer, choreographer and director, he has spent much of his career focused on issues of American identity.

"As a choreographer I look at questions about home and family — and being biracial has further informed my aesthetic. A lot of what I do is about that search for a place to call home, a sense of belonging. When I was a kid, being biracial was a strange place to be," said Burgess, who is 41.

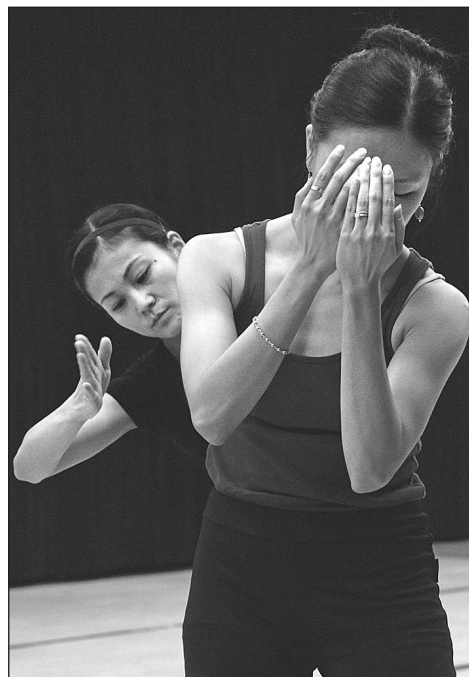
"It's amazing to me now that we have Barack Obama as president," he added. "There is a fascinating in-between place that exists here that I think is unique to Americans."

This "in-between place" was the subject of his recent acclaimed work "Hyphen," which explored the experience of being a hyphenated American — Asian-American, African-American, and so on.

Burgess first came to Washington to study dance at George Washington University, and this year he was named chair of the school's Department of Theatre and Dance.

He's also been running his own troupe, the Dana Tai Soon Burgess Company, for 17 seasons in Washington. This past Friday at Dance Place in Brookland, his company premiered "Island," another work investigating issues of identity and culture.

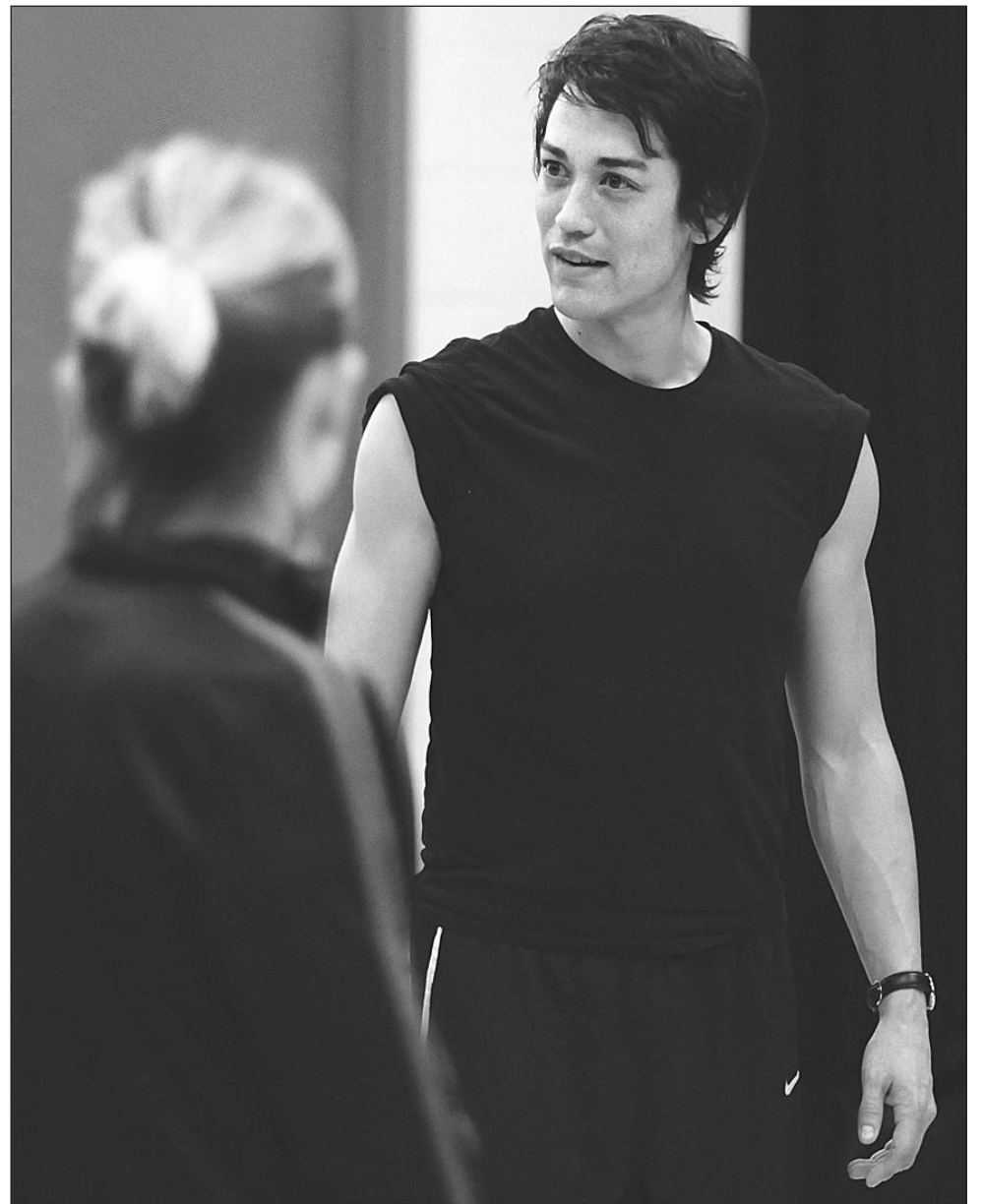
The name refers to Angel Island, located just off the coast of San Francisco close to



Alcatraz. From 1910 to 1940, the island housed an immigration station that processed hundreds of thousands of immigrants, largely from China but also from Japan, Russia, South Asia and Korea. Although some immigrants were sent quickly on to the mainland, others, primarily from China, were held on the island for months, and many were deported.

"Abstractly, it's about immigrants coming from the motherland to the United States. But it is also a sad piece — many were turned away," said Burgess.

A multimedia work, "Island" features images relating to Angel Island projected on
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Bill Petros/The Current

Dana Tai Soon Burgess, above, who was recently named chair of George Washington University's Department of Theatre and Dance, pursues questions of identity with his work. Left, dancers rehearse Burgess' latest piece, "Island," which premiered last week.

HOME & GARDEN



Courtesy of Maria Stenzel

Resident Sharon Hayes talks with Sam Witherbee, field director of WeatherizeDC. The program encourages residents to install proper insulation and energy-efficient appliances.

Program urges homeowners to weatherize D.C.

By **STEPHANIE KANOWITZ**
Current Correspondent

As the temperatures fall and you reach to turn up the thermostat, stop to consider the chain reaction that simple move will set off: The heating system will burn more energy, enlarging your carbon footprint and your electric bill.

That's the thought process the folks behind WeatherizeDC hope to spark with their campaign to make Washington the gold standard for green living.

WeatherizeDC is a field program of the DC Project, a nonprofit that two firefighters and four former Obama campaign staffers founded in January of this year.

"Our vision is that D.C. will be a model green city," said creative

director Kristen Psaki. "We view weatherization as a linchpin of a revitalized community. It's one of those big pillars ... because it's the first step. Weatherizing your home saves on energy bills, it really reduces your carbon footprint but also creates jobs" by creating demand for green services.

WeatherizeDC kicked off Sept. 12, and the group aims to get 200 homeowners signed up for home energy audits by March. Weatherizing — which involves installing proper insulation and using energy-efficient appliances — a couple-hundred homes would save \$60,000 to \$120,000 in energy costs and reduce the community's carbon output by almost 3,600 tons, Psaki said.

"It's the same thing as taking 600 cars off the road, planting

84,000 trees and reducing our dependence on over 7,000 barrels of oil, and most importantly, it creates up to seven jobs," she said.

Here's how WeatherizeDC works: Volunteers go door-to-door touting the benefits of weatherization. Interested homeowners then attend community meetings to get more details and sign up for an audit. WeatherizeDC works with Access Green, a company based in Northeast D.C. that assesses homes, finding energy-sapping spots and recommending fixes. The audits cost about \$500, but every group of 10 homeowners who sign up through WeatherizeDC gets 20 percent off.

The D.C. government also offers free audits to those who qualify.

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DANCER

From Page 15

the floor beneath the dancers.
Burgess and his team of designers,
including Massachusetts Institute
of Technology director of theater
design Sara Brown, use archival
footage from the immigration sta-
tion and "graffiti poetry" from the
island. The poetry is the product of
inhabitants of the immigration sta-
tion, reflecting their emotions as
their lives were held in limbo.

The music in "Island" includes
popular Shanghai tunes from the
1920s, which were familiar to
Burgess because his father played
them while he was growing up.

Burgess credits his designers
and the dancers in his company for
the success of this work. Boasting
American, Swiss, Peruvian,
Bolivian, Korean, Chinese,
Japanese and Egyptian back-
grounds, many of his dancers have
been with the company for years.

"It is unusual for dancers to stay
with a company for more than a
couple of years," said Burgess.
"Some of mine have been here for

10, 11 years. This is such a great
group, there is such high retention
here because it functions like a
family."

Burgess says he finds dancers
who are not only highly talented,
but also intellectual and respectful
of other cultures. "I am very, very
careful about choosing dancers.
When people are comfortable with
their peers, are listening and aware,
they are more creative and open
with their movement," he said.

Highly international in its reach,
the company has traveled through-
out the world over its 17 years.
Despite all of this traveling, and a
childhood so far from the East
Coast, Burgess said he has found a
great deal of stability and success
in Washington.

"D.C. is such an international
city, and it is so diverse, but is has
a strong regional and local commu-
nity. Plus there is so much art and
culture here; an artist can really
have a good quality of life. It was
the perfect place for me to build a
career."

Perhaps, in his adopted city of
Washington, Burgess has found his
place to call home.

WEATHER

From Page 15

"We are the organizing nonprof-
it bringing people together, and
then the local, small green busi-
nesses are the ones who will actu-
ally do the work, make the energy
assessments and take people
through those next steps," said Sam
Wetherbee, WeatherizeDC's field
director. "Our goal is ... trying to
utilize those strong personal rela-
tionships that exist within all of our
communities to come together to
talk about these very important
issues," he said.

Ten homeowners have signed
up for audits so far, Wetherbee said.
The next community meeting is
tonight at 7 at the 2nd District
Police Station, 3320 Idaho Ave.

WeatherizeDC piggybacks on
the DC Project's first program, a
citywide coordination that, among
other things, built a green-jobs
training program. The group paired
Federal City Recovery Services, a
drug addiction treatment facility in
D.C., with Green Pathway DC, a
partnership between Goodwill of
Greater Washington and the D.C.
Green Builders Council that offers
a 10-week job-training program in
the fields of sustainable building,
weatherization and smart-meter
installation.

"Our role was identifying peo-
ple who were involved in the
organizations and getting them to
sit at a table together," Psaki said.

With the unemployment rate in
D.C. reaching 11.1 percent in
August, the DC Project is working
to make sure that the jobs being
created through weatherization are
going to people who need them
most. "People from every area,
every quadrant are going to be ben-
efiting from the creation of these
new, green, good jobs. The fastest

way to create these jobs is through
investment in weatherization,"
Psaki said.

Weatherization has caught the
eye of more than just the DC
Project's seven staff members and
100-plus volunteers.

Ward 3 D.C. Council member
Mary Cheh recently proposed the
Responsibility in Weatherization
Emergency Amendment Act of
2009, but withdrew it from the leg-
islative agenda Oct. 6 to work out
more details.

The District Department of the
Environment offers free home
energy audits to D.C. residents
with homes of 4,000 square feet or
less. The department also offers
weatherization and appliance
replacement assistance to qualify-
ing low-income residents.

At the federal level, the
American Recovery and
Reinvestment Act of 2009 gives
homeowners who make energy-
efficiency home improvements fed-
eral income tax credits of 30 per-
cent of the cost of the measures, or
a maximum of \$1,500; thus the
credit applies to up to \$5,000 in
improvements put in service before
Dec. 31, 2010.

These efforts are helpful, but
action starts at the grass-roots level,
said Maria Stenzel, a freelance
photographer for National
Geographic who held a
WeatherizeDC meeting at her
Palisades home last week.

"We read about climate
change in the newspapers and see
news reports about it and see Al
Gore's film, 'An Inconvenient
Truth,' and people want to do
something," she said. "They feel
powerless. This way of doing it
as a community is a really power-
ful way for people to feel less out
of control."

To get involved, visit weatherize-dc.org or call 202-495-1328.

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