

## See the big premiere, download the sketch

by Robert Johnson/The Star-Ledger

Thursday March 19, 2009, 1:55 PM



ROSALIE O'CONNOR This week, Susan Marshall and Company will appear at MSU's Alexander Kasser Theatre offering the premiere of Marshall's "Adamantine."

Susan Marshall has been living large, but thinking small. The celebrated contemporary artist has been in residence at Montclair State University choreographing and filming quirky miniature pieces she calls "Frame Dances" -- designed so people can download the videos to their cell phones and iPods.

The videos are posted on the website of Montclair State's Peak Performances series, [peakperfs.org](http://peakperfs.org); to download them, you need a code -- which you can get by purchasing tickets to any Peak Performances show.

And this week, the dancers of Susan Marshall and Company will break out of the child-size sandbox in which a camera has recorded their movements for the (really) small screen to deliver one of those shows. They will appear at MSU's Alexander Kasser Theatre offering the premiere of Marshall's "Adamantine."

Marshall describes "Adamantine" as a departure from her most recent dances, including "Cloudless," an award-winning piece she created at MSU in 2006.

"The assignment that I gave myself was to figure out how to have some of that intimacy carry in a large hall," she says. "How to play with the stage so that interactions with the lights and with the theater amplify a small action on stage."

Marshall and her troupe improvised with the hardware on the Kasser Theatre's naked stage -- sandbags, fans, pipes and lights.

"I suppose if you're looking for a theme that would be it," Marshall says of her plotless work. "These dancers are moving through an unpredictable environment that constrains them or allows them freedom." She says she chose "Adamantine" for its poetic resonance (the mythological substance "adamant" has supernatural strength and brilliance). There is an original score by instrument maker and folklorist Peter Whitehead.

"Cloudless," which went on to enjoy two successful runs at Dance Theater Workshop in New York, is an assemblage of wistful and humorous vignettes. It was filled with props and oddball characters -- like the woman who balanced upside down with a teacup on her rear end. Marshall's "sandbox" device made its debut there, with dancers crowding inside and shifting position, their dreamy evolutions filmed and projected onto a screen. The tiny "Frame Dances" bustle with madcap incidents. Dancers climb over tables, carve whorls in sand or float provocatively in milky water.

Marshall says that in making dances she is often motivated by structural curiosity. With a difference in scale, however, comes a difference in approach. In "Adamantine," she says, the question was, "how to create these big swaths of dancing that is open-ended yet holds your interest and has emotional overtones."

"What Jed Wheeler and Peak Performances are doing at Montclair is what the art form needs," Marshall says of the executive director for arts and cultural programming at MSU, who commissioned "Adamantine." "They are making new art happen -- risky art -- and there are very few places in the United States that are taking that on."