

# Sara Mearns & Jodi Melnick: Ballet Glamour Meets Modern Dance Glamour

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When New York City Ballet principal Sara Mearns got a hankering to work with a woman choreographer, she was tapping into a something that has become a big issue in the dance world. (Hey, if a woman can run for President, why can't more female choreographers be hired by NYCB?) She didn't want just any woman choreographer, but someone who could challenge her. That's a tall order for a ballet superstar who has danced lead roles in more than 30 Balanchine ballets and 10 Robbins ballets.

But Melnick comes from another side of town. In our Feb. 2013 cover story, "[Downtown Diva](#)," she said that, for her, ballet "was physically unenjoyable." She's danced with some of the most interesting, (post)modern dancemakers, including Twyla Tharp, Sara Rudner, Trisha Brown, Vicky Shick and Susan Rethorst. She has an uncanny ability to imbue movement with high style yet allow it to read in a plurality of ways. In her choreography, the impetus for movement starts from deep within; she can turn the subtlest kind of gesture into something fascinating. Her brand of charisma is inimitable. But then, so is Mearns'. In our cover story on Mearns, "[No Holds Barred](#)," writer Astrida Woods called her dancing "explosive and passionate." She is no ordinary ballet dancer.

The two worked together for Danspace's "Platform 2015: Dancers, Buildings and People in the Streets." I remember Mearns was strewn on the floor in a decidedly unballetic pose as the audience filed in. She was wearing sneakers; I'd never seen her looking so....athletic. What Melnick and Mearns have in common is that, no matter how hard they try to shed their virtuosity, they both have a rock bottom kind of glamour.

When Mearns approached Melnick for this project, she was willing



to explore but did not promise to make a ballet. But one thing leads to another, and she has made a ballet—for Mearns and NYCB dancers Jared Angle and Gretchen Smith. The working title is *Working in Process/ New Bodies*.

Melnick's residency at the Guggenheim Museum's Works and Process series culminates in performances Nov. 13 and 14. Claudia La Rocco, the dance critic who conceived last year's Platform, will moderate. Original music is by Robert Boston, with additional live music for harpsichord and violin by György Ligeti and Heinrich Biber.