

## PERFORMING ARTS

# Moving Picture Show

*Reynolda House performance will re-create billowy movements of magic-lantern projections*

By Ken Keuffel  
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"One way to make the images move is to move the screen," Jody Sperling said recently. "So essentially, I am the screen."

Sperling runs the Time Lapse Dance, a New York-based company that recreates contemporary-dance performances from the early 20th century. She was discussing *Magic-Lantern Dance* (2002), which she will present Friday at Reynolda House Museum of American Art. The performance, which will also include a lecture, is part of the museum's "Moving Pictures" exhibition on American art and early film.

In this case, the "images" will be videotaped representations of those on glass slides projected from a magic lantern, the precursor of the film projector. (Magic lanterns are like old-fashioned slide projectors. The person who uses one is a projectionist; he moves one slide after another behind lenses.) The "screen" will be Sperling's billowy, poncho-like white costume. It will catch the images, which are of the sea, ships, stars, flags and faces of presidents.

"As I move the costume, it creates this sort of rippling effect of images, spirals and shapes," Sperling said. "That's where the choreography is."

But that's not all. The costume will move in time with Jeffrey Middleton's piano music.

Terry Borton, the founder of the American Magic-Lantern Theater, has provided his magic-lantern projections during previous performances of *Magic-Lantern Dance*. But there won't be a magic lantern for Friday's because Borton (and his lantern, which is a rare antique) will be elsewhere. However, a tape of Borton using his magic lantern will be shown before the performance.

For Friday's performance, Sperling will use images

(recorded on DVD) that Borton has shot on a wall. It's a process that Sperling described as "kind of fitting."

"The magic lantern is kind of like the precursor to video," she said. "We've kind of gone full circle. What video can do is conjure the ghosts of past technologies. I'm interested in doing it in the context of this exhibit. (It's about) figuring out how to make images move."

*Magic-Lantern Dance*, as many of Sperling's performances do, draws on the styles of contemporary dancer Loie Fuller (1862-1928) and her imitators for inspiration. Fuller, an American, made her mark in Paris — captivating audiences there by crafting what Sperling describes as "mesmerizing, multimedia spectacles out of fabric, motion and light."

"(She) would travel with a projectionist," Sperling said. "It was like a novelty act. This is our take on the novelty act of

the mid- and late 1890s."

During a dance, Fuller would manipulate fabric by moving wands imbedded in the fabric. She could move her costume in such a way that it came to resemble a flower in bloom, with each petal reflecting a different color or shade of light.

"There's quite a lot of vocabulary you can do for the costume," said Sperling, who discovered Fuller during research for a dance-history project. "She really created these huge spirals, little tornadoes, roses, waves. It's actually a very dynamic landscape for the images to fall on."

*Magic-Lantern Dance* is in four sections — The Sea, Night Sky, Patriotic and Ediotrope. The Patriotic section, done to patriotic music that was popular in the Vaudeville era, promises to be funny and stirring.

"We have this picture of Lady Liberty and we have this picture of Uncle Sam," Sperling said.

"Then we kind of dissolve in pictures of Washington and Lincoln."

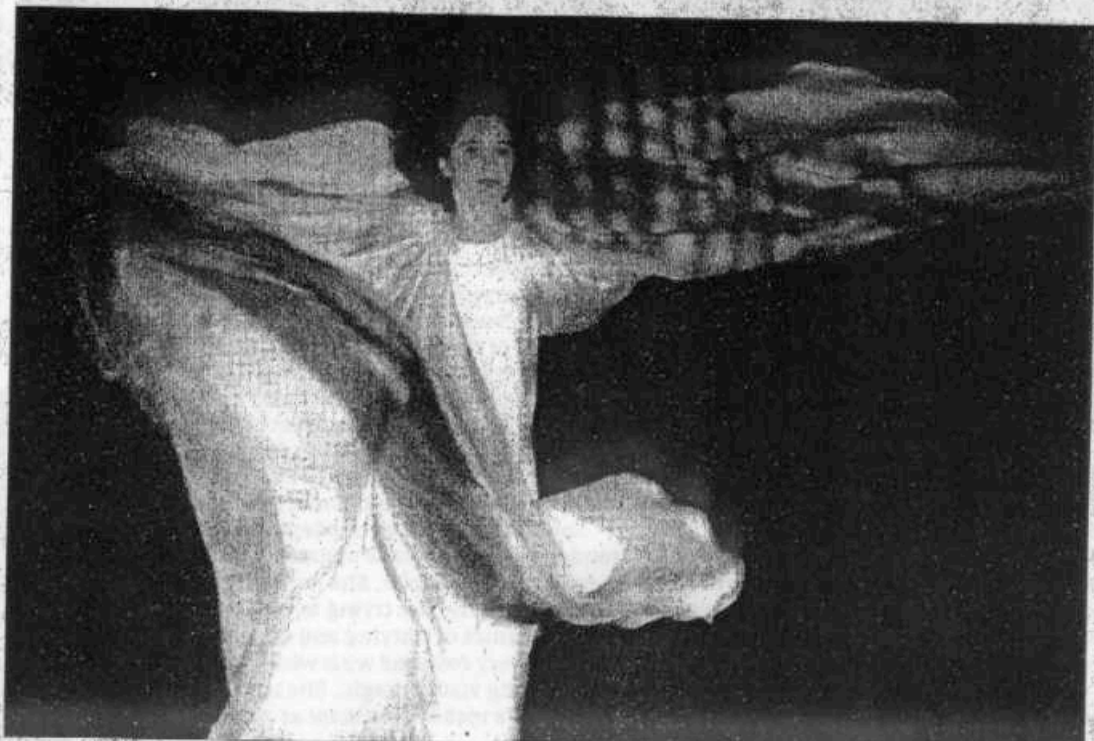
Night Sky uses slides from the 1850s that Borton's grandfather used to teach astronomy.

"There are pictures of the planets," Sperling said. "There are pictures of a comet. There are pictures of zodiac. I catch those images on different places on the fabric."

"There's something quite hypnotic when you see an image waver on the fabric," she said. "It tricks your eye. It challenges your perception of stability."

■ Jody Sperling will present a lecture/performance at 8 p.m. Friday in the Babcock Wing of the Reynolda House Museum of American Art. Admission is \$15, \$10 for Reynolda members and students. Call 758-5150.

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JULIE LEMBERGER PHOTO

Jody Sperling's white costume will be the "screen" and her dance will bring pictures to life, telling a story.