

## York University Graduate Dance Department Symposium Series Winter 2019

**Prof. Priya Thomas, Texas Women's University  
Thursday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019, 6-8 pm**

**PLEASE NOTE ROOM HAS CHANGED TO:  
Studio F (Accolade East 244), McLean Performance Studio**

### **Dancing Muses, Roller Disco and the Phantasmagoric Feminine: Terpsichore in the Move Musical *Xanadu*, 1980**

Depictions of the Greek muses form a staple in Hollywood musicals, recurring since the 1940s. From Alexander Hall's musical comedy *Down to Earth* (1947) starring Rita Hayworth, to William A. Seiter's Broadway-based, Kurt Weil-scored *One Touch of Venus* (1948) and Walter Lang's *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954), a combined arsenal of text, song, dance, and cinematic technologies breathe life into Hollywood's modern screen goddesses. Nowhere however, is American musical theatre's commitment to the combined power of these four elements more evident than in the genre's adaptations of the Greek muse Terpsichore, daughter of Zeus, and champion of dance and choral song.

Within the aforementioned range of Hollywood musicals, Robert Greenwald's reanimation of Terpsichore in the cult classic, *Xanadu* (1980), starring Olivia Newton-John and Gene Kelly, offers a vital point of intersection between dance, musical theatre, and the cinematic. Despite its distinction as one of the most critically and commercially panned films produced in Hollywood history, *Xanadu*'s campy, neo-mythological iteration of Terpsichore not only taps into cinema's inherent potential for illusion to recast the classical Greek muse as a big-screen deity, but turns directly to the history of theatrical dance (its narrative tropes, technologies and movement vocabularies) to prototypically resuscitate its dancing muse as technosensual, airborne woman.

Priya Thomas, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Dance at Texas Woman's University (BA, MA, PhD programs). She received her BA in Religious Studies at McGill University, and her MA and PhD in Dance Studies at York University. Concurrently trained as a Bharata Natyam dancer (in the T. Balasaraswati tradition) and as a classical violinist, she spent more than a decade as a songwriter/recording artist and touring musician. Maintaining a unique career bridging dance, music, and performance writ large, her recent scholarly and creative activities reflect a multidisciplinary critical practice that straddles dance, theatre, music, digital media, cultural theory, public art, and community-



based projects. In particular, her research and production across these domains focuses on corporeal transgression and transformation in performances both ritual and theatrical. Her writings have appeared in academic journals and edited anthologies ( *Dance Chronicle* , The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism, among others). Her colloquium talk (based on a forthcoming publication in *Studies in Musical Theatre*) investigates nonhumans in performance, with particular emphasis on the body viz. materiality and technology.

**Graduate Student Symposium**  
**Friday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019**  
**Studio F (Accolade East Building, Room 244), 10am-6pm**

Featuring presentations from and workshop roundtables for current Dance MA, MFA and PhD students.

First year MA and PhD Students: send a Talk Title, Abstract and Bio to [maryf@yorku.ca](mailto:maryf@yorku.ca) (Subject heading “GSS Submission”) by Feb 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (Talks will be 15 minutes each)

First year MFA Students: send a Thesis Title and a few sentences about your topic to [maryf@yorku.ca](mailto:maryf@yorku.ca) (Subject heading “GSS Submission”) by Feb 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (Roundtables will include pitches about projects of 5 minutes each and then discussion of topic with group)

**Group Trip to Dancing in Common DSA Conference**  
**with U of T graduate students**  
**August 8-11, 2019, Northwestern University**

Declare interest by either submitting an abstract to the conference or notifying Prof. Mary Woehrel that you are interested to be involved in coordinated roundtable by Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 or notifying MW that you would like to attend the conference without presenting by Jan. 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019.