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David Dorfman Dance grooves to Sly and the Family Stone

By [Kristina Dorsey](#) Day Arts Editor

Dancer David Dorfman says, simply, "I've always been the biggest, biggest fan of Sly and the Family Stone."

He has a vivid memory of working out with a pal in high school - Dorfman was on the baseball and football teams, his friend was a basketball player - and they put on an 8-track (yes, an 8-track) of Sly and the Family Stone.

"We played it over and over again. This became kind of like an anthem," he says.

Dorfman was addicted to "Soul Train" and says, "Everything about the culture of soul and funk appealed to me."

And then, during his first week as a freshman at Washington University at St. Louis, the school hosted a concert by Sly and the Family Stone.

Dorfman, now an acclaimed choreographer and head of the David Dorfman Dance troupe, is returning to Sly with his new work, "Prophets of Funk - Dance to the Music," which the group will perform Friday at Connecticut College's Palmer Auditorium.

Dorfman, a 1981 Conn grad, is now the college's dance department chair. In 2007, the New York-based David Dorfman Dance was named permanent company-in-residence at Connecticut College.

While Sly and the Family Stone produced groove-happy songs - think "Dance to the Music," "Everyday People," "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" - the group also earned renown for being one of the first American bands to be integrated in terms of both race and gender. It had a social consciousness, too.

"Prophets of Funk" calls on elements of Sly and the Family Stone, looking at, as Dorfman says, "the funk of everyday life, the joy of everyday life" and how everyday people still hope and still aspire.

The power of Sly and the Family Stone came back to Dorfman three years ago in a first-person way when he caught a Family Stone concert (minus the reclusive Sly) at Mohegan Sun.

"I popped up there by myself and saw the show, and it was just incredible. They have, I believe, four of the original members, and they've gathered other young musicians. They have a great sound. I loved it, loved it, loved it," he says. "I went up and got their autographed picture afterward, got the business card of the manager, and I thought, 'I want

to do a dance to this music."

It's not just the best-known tunes that'll be here. Dorfman describes one piece as a romantic waltz and another as "a crazy, upbeat song that sounds like James Brown."

It won't just be members of David Dorfman Dance that'll be moving during the show. When theatergoers arrive at Palmer, students will be teaching them bits of a line dance that David Dorfman Dance will be doing in the actual performance. The idea is, later, people from the audience can come onstage and become those everyday people dancing.

When creating "Prophets of Funk," the members of David Dorfman Dance looked at old footage on YouTube - of TV shows that Sly and the Family Stone were on, of their performances at the Ohio State Fair and Woodstock.

"I'd lay out (dance) phrases as I normally do at the beginning of any piece, and then the company would either collectively develop that phrase material - in this case, we called it funkifying it - and I'd also call on the company to make up their own movements, their own solo movements, that are incorporated into the piece as well," he says. "Then, one time, I just improvised, we videoed it, and that was transformed over (the rehearsal period) into 'Love City,' for example. So we have different ways of making our movement sections, and we turn it around endlessly till we get it where we like it."

David Dorfman Dance, "Prophets of Funk - Dance to the Music," 8 p.m. Friday, Palmer Auditorium, Connecticut College, Mohegan Avenue, New London; \$20-\$28 (\$18-\$25 seniors, \$10-\$14 students); (860) 439-2787, onstage.conncoll.edu.
