MEMBERSHIP
Dancers’ Group - publisher of In Dance - provides resources to artists, the dance community, and audiences through programs and services that are as collaborative and innovative as the creative process.

Dancers’ Group has extended all memberships through Jan 2021. Join today for weekly updates from the dance community, first access to performances to the community, first access to listings in our online performance calendar, and emailed to over 1,700 members.

Resources and Opportunities
Once a week, Dancers’ Group sends out its DG Weekly email, which includes recent community notices, artistic services that are as collaborative and innovative as the creative process. It’s primal, and it feeds us, and it continues to be the thing we come back to. So continue to question. And continue to demand change.

WELCOME

I HOPE YOU’RE WELL, AND I HOPE YOU’RE SAFE.

For most of 2020 these daily words were written in emails, texts and in posts on social. They do bear repeating: Dancers’ Group hopes you’re well, and we hope you’re safe. These direct and caring sentiments reflect the many unknowns taking place during this shared situation known as COVID. I’m OK. Are you OK? I think that trying to make sense of this time is in part a realization that human and natural systems are not separate. Hey, World. Are you OK?

Let’s be kind and generous and ready to move toward truths we know to be true — in dance, in the World. I hope you’re well, and I hope you’re safe.

—Wayne Hazzard, Artist Administrator

DANCERS’ GROUP

Artistic Administrator
Wayne Hazzard
Associate Director
Katie Taylor
Program Assistant
Andria Speerman
Administrative Assistant
Shellie Jow
Bookkeeper
Michele Simon
Design
Sharon Anderson

SUBMIT
Performances to the Community Calendar
Dancers’ Group promotes performance listings in our online performance calendar, and emailed to over 1,700 members.

Resources and Opportunities
Once a week, Dancers’ Group sends out its DG Weekly email, which includes recent community notices, artistic opportunities, grant deadlines, local news, and more.

LEVELS
Community (FREE)
Individual ($50/yr, $90/2yr)
Company ($85/yr, $153/2yr)

JOIN or RENEW
dancersgroup.org

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photo by Robbie Sweeney

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Cover: Danti Menghino, photo by Aokiek Sweeney
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I hope you’re well, and I hope you’re safe.
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DANCERS’ GROUP

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• Featured artists and news
• Discounts
• Jobs
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dancersgroup.org

PHOTO BY PAK HAN
dancersgroup.org

DANCERS’ GROUP

SFDFFF
SAN FRANCISCO DANCE FILM FESTIVAL
OCTOBER 18-25, 2020

12 Programs / 45 Countries
Created, Jeff Young Yoo

BEYOND MY STEPS
A film by Karen Lea

MAURICE HINES
BRING THEM BACK

REVISITOR
Created by Crystal Moe and Jonathon Young

TOM

UPROOTED
THE INSIDER: FILM DANCE

AFTER DARK

BAY AREA SHORTS

DANCE GOES ON
FINDING ME

SERIOUSLY SCREEN DANCE
RAISING VOICES

FOR TICKETS AND MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
SFDANCEFILMFBEST.ORG

PHOTO BY PAK HAN
B
eginning on September 13 and running through November 21, HMD’s 2020 Bridge Project presents **POWER SHIFT: Improvisational Activism and Community** in that a festival that features the improvisational practices and diverse dance genres of leading Black/African American, Latino/Latin American, Asian American, female-identifying, and queer improvisers and social justice activists from around the world. In a swift pivot to online and outdoor platforms, the festival organizers will offer art and activism workshops, improvisation practices for both rookies and old hands, and live-streamed performances.

HMD stands for Hope Mohr Dance, and The Bridge Project has been Mohr’s curatorial platform for ten years. But this spring, the organization announced a shift to a “distributed leadership” model, which might mean that Hope Mohr Dance goes the way of the Oberlin Dance Collective—from words to acronym.

**Simas A shift from second to third wave feminism.** Hope: I wore two hats for a long time: an activist outside the dance world and an activist inside the dance world. Within the dance world, my curating had been tied up in my own aesthetic lineage, which is white postmodernism. So when I started curating, I was bringing in people like Anna Halprin, Sim- one Forti, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown—all white women. All of the choreographers I’ve ever danced for professionally have been white. As an activist outside the dance world, my awareness and engagement was much more inter-sectional. I was a Latin American Studies major, I did fieldwork in the domestic violence movement in Central America. I had that awareness, but I hadn’t yet figured out how to implement it into curating.

**Hope: The Bridge Project’s programs have been social justice-driven for a long time.** More recently, that engine has become more focused on cultural and racial equity, most specifically with Dancing Around Race (2017-2018). Through that project, I was in a lot of working and personal relationships with artists of color and involved in conversa-
tions where I was frequently hearing the need for white people to step back. I started thinking about what that would mean for me personally and what that would mean to apply that to the organization that I founded. I also felt like there was an increasing discon-nect between our public facing programming and our internal organizational structures. I wanted to bring the internal structures into alignment with those values.

**Simas A shift from second to distributed leadership model? And what is distributed leadership?** Hope: The Bridge Project’s programs have been social justice-driven for a long time. More recently, that engine has become more focused on cultural and racial equity, most specifically with Dancing Around Race (2017-2018). Through that project, I was in a lot of working and personal relationships with artists of color and involved in conversations where I was frequently hearing the need for white people to step back. I started thinking about what that would mean for me personally and what that would mean to apply that to the organization that I founded. I also felt like there was an increasing disconnect between our public facing programming and our internal organizational structures. I wanted to bring the internal structures into alignment with those values.

**Simas When did you, Karla, come into the organization?** Karla: My first engagement with HMD was as a dancer in the 2016 Bridge Project, Ten Artists Respond to Tшинa (a multi-disciplinary response to the legacy of Trisha Brown). I started working as a dancer in Hope’s work in 2017 and then as an admin person later that year.

**Simas: I’ve seen you in a lot of different admin spaces. And dance stages.** Karla: Yeah, I do a lot of different support roles for folks in the non-profit space. Before dancing, I used to work in transportation advocacy in New York; particularly in Spanish-speaking communities. I started working with HMD as an admin manager, mostly helping Hope carry out the programming in any way was helpful. It may not have been distributed leadership, but a lot of the work was collaborative. It’s interesting that “distributed leadership” is a buzzword now because there’s always a lot of collaborative leadership within non-profit spaces. Maybe it’s not acknowledged as such.

**Simas: I’m always a little leery of the word collaborative because, yes, it means we work together but it doesn’t necessarily mean that we do so in a non-hierarchical way. Does part of announcing a shift to distributed leadership mean claiming a non-hierarchical relationship between the organization’s moving parts?** Karla: Yes. There is that desire among the staff and also with the artists to figure out ways to flatten the hierarchy between all of us when we’re working together. What I’ve observed in the move to distributed leadership is that it’s tied to these macro questions that people have had in the dance community around how sustainable is it to run an organization, to put on a dance concert, to make work using the models and paradigms that have been prevalent for however many years. In part it’s a conscious effort to counter exist-
ing patterns of how we do things, the way that we fundraise, the way that we put excess production value on driven work.

**Simas: How has your role in the organization changed since the shift?** Karla: My work is changing a lot because I have to change the way that I see it. Even though I felt that my contributions were acknowledged and respected, I was not hired to vision for the program. I’ve been thinking a lot about what that shift means because it seems like an easy shift, but it’s not. In par-
ticular, if I’m part of something I respect already, I’m inclined to support it in the way that it exists.

**Simas: To suddenly become part of not just promoting but creating the vision?** Karla: Yes, that’s a very different thing even if you’ve already had a lot of autonomy in terms of the work that you were doing in the organization.

**Simas: What’s your relationship to HMD, Cherie?** Cherie: A year ago I came on as HMD’s Community Engagement Coordinator. I was mainly working with the Community Engagement Residency (CER) program, which I was really excited about because of its focus on cultural equity and working with artists. I’ve done a lot of work in equity in dance education. But I was interested in what the organization look like before Dancing Around Race? Hope: The program was anchored originally in feminism and a commitment on my part to honoring and centering female-identified voices and lineage in dance. Over time that curatorial commitment became more intersectional.

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that would look like in a dance company that wasn't dance education focused. My long-term goal is to start my own residency program in the Caribbean, so this was great field research for that. Then in January, I met with Hope to renew my contract and the idea of distributed leadership and moving me into a bigger role as Director of Artistic and Community Engagement Residency program selected me. I didn't know exactly what that would mean, but I was in for the ride.

Sima: Can any of you name the first real step HMD took toward enacting distributed leadership?

Cherie: All of us co-curated this year’s Bridge Project. The theme of improvisation was really intriguing to me as a creative dance and improvisation teacher and as someone who was really supportive of who we were interested in bringing artists into positions of power over aesthetics and resources.

Sima: What’s an example of how one might distribute power to artists? Or what did it look like before you embarked on this process?

Hope: Our board is now 100 percent working artists and that was not the case six months ago. After we announced our move to distributed leadership, three of the board members, in conversation with me, decided it was time to step down. There's been an intentional transition away from a traditional nonprofit board that's conceived as a fundraising engine comprised of people with connections to money and networks. I think that’s an outdated model. Value-aligning the board has been an important part of this transition. We’re also having former lead artists in the Community Engagement Residency program select the next round of artists in partnership with HMD staff and I am stepping off that selection panel. We’re also talking about a paid artist council with curatorial power or the power to hold the organization accountable to our stated and operational values. Things like that.

Sima: What are some of the things the artists said or asked for?

Cherie: One big topic was race. What does distributed leadership mean for us and the artist or fails to honor their agreement, that's another way that we're trying to support your programs? Is there a disconnect between how one might distribute power to artists? Or what did it look like before you embarked on this process?

Hope: Something I’ve learned about HMD is that the artist pays the price. Funders need to shift their way of thinking because the foundation only accepts 501(c)(3) applications and the nonprofit messes up on the application, the artist pays the price. Or if the nonprofit fails to be transparent with the artist or offers to support their own organization, the artists must partner with a nonprofit to apply for grants. In terms of how we distribute power to artists? Or what did it look like before you embarked on this process?

Hope: Sometimes it can happen even in the application process. If an artist is relying on a nonprofit for a foundation opportunity, they might not even know of. Sometimes they don’t have the direct information or direct access to the money. If there’s poor communication, too often the artist pays the price. The question is, how can nonprofits step away from that gatekeeping role and provide more direct access to resources?

Sima: What kind of problems do artists run into in this model?

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Karla: When I came on board, the CER program supported one lead mentor artist and access to former lead artists. A lot of historically white-led organizations have positioned themselves as regranting organizations. They regrant funds to others who have collaborators they work with. The CER also transitioned from a mentorship program to a capacity building program. We’re still asking questions about what that means to shift, share, cede power within a program. We’re also interested in seed funding. The question is, how can nonprofits step away from that gatekeeping role and provide more direct access to resources?

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We want people to check out Power Shift, The Bridge Project that’s coming up and join us.

Hope: That’s another aspect to this commitment to distributing power. White artists who move in circles of power and have relationships with funders, donors, and program officers can directly connect those folks with artists. This is one way of bringing new voices to the table. Instead of saying, “I’ll get that grant for you,” say, “Meet this person, you can apply for this grant!”

Sima: This sounds like a sideways movement. Unblocking access, stepping aside rather than stepping down.

Hope: I just published a blog post about stepping back. White folks shouldn’t withdraw and disengage as a way of avoiding the structural work of antiracism. What does it mean to stay in the work while also making space for other voices? Sometimes it’s appropriate for white people to step away entirely and that might be what I do eventually, but I also feel like there has to be capacity building, a transitioning of relationships and resources, and an engagement in difficult conversations. Just saying “I’m out of here” may not always be the best thing to do. In dance, there’s a dominant model: the founder starts the organization and puts their name on it and then all the programs are tangled up in the founder’s personality. It’s crucial to disentangle the cult of personality from the founder. I agree. I don’t think we have a definition yet because it’s still in process and we’re at the earlier stages of it. I think distributed leadership in general is unique to who we are doing it. I think the things you say are parts of it, at least where we are with it now. A year from now there could be a lot more components. I would also add that stepping back is a big part of it too. I’ve seen Hope step back in a lot of ways—being more cautious about time, sharing decisions with Karla and me. I’ve even stepped back, just listening to the artists and what they said, rethinking curation and who that should come from. It’s been about sharing responsibilities and giving up power at times.

Sima: In an older paradigm, I’d think it would be more efficient because you would delegate tasks.

Hope: It’s less efficient.

Cherie: And more work.

Karla: In particular when we’re talking about partnering with artists. It’s about providing the resources and information artists need to take ownership or leadership over something. If people don’t know the structure that’s currently in place, where things come from and what the thinking is behind them, then it’s a really tall ask to say, do you want to share leadership over this. A lot of it is about how we communicate information with each other and the community. That’s where the focus of distributed leadership is right now. Also, it’s revealing that what is most scarce is our time. Hope: For me, distributed leadership is not just structural. It’s cultural. The culture of the organization needs to shift and that takes time. It’s about unpacking the layers of power. It’s about relationships. It’s about shifting how the organization relates to time, efficiency, and control. Those deeper organizational shifts get at white supremacist culture, which pervades nonprofits and philanthropy. Just changing who’s inside the system is not going to change that much.

Sima: What can In Dance readers do to support HMD’s new adventures?

Hope: We want to bring more working artists onto the board, so if people are interested in being a part of this work, reach out to us.

Also, I’m interested in being in conversation with other organizations who are doing this work or navigating similar shifts. To normalize those shifts, I think it’s important that the learning doesn’t happen behind closed doors. We need to share our learning curves, our mistakes, and our vulnerabilities.

Cherie: We’re calling for organizations to be more transparent with the artists they work with.

Hope: We want people to check out Power Shift, The Bridge Project that’s coming up and join us. That’s a step toward engaging equity and supporting diversity for our community in dance. People should read HMD’s blog. Folks have asked that we publicize our process and decisions more, so keep an eye out for that.

Sima BELMAR, Ph.D., is a lecturer in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and the DOD Writer in Residence. To keep up with Sima’s writing please subscribe to tinyletter.com/simabelmar.
THE 14TH EPISODE OF
HOUSE/FULL OF BLACKWOMEN

NEW CHITLIN CIRCUITRY:
REPARATIONS
VAUDEVILLE

BY TOBE MELORA CORREAL, DANA KAWANO,
FRANCES PHILLIPS, MARVIN K. WHITE, & ZAKIYA HARRIS
PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

Learn about the public events and follow on Instagram
JUNE 2013...
I want to do “A House Full of Black Women!” — Amara Tabor-Smith

These were the words that came falling out of Amara’s mouth, sweet and easy, like fat golden corn falls ripe and juicy off a late-summer cob. It was mere hours after the soul-stirring finish of Amara’s 2013 presentation of He Moved Swiftly’s “Room Full of Black Men” and I was still speechless with awe at the majesty that had taken place there. We were two sister-friends of 40+ years having some kitchen table-talk and debriefing the show. A house full of Black women?? I didn’t know what that was; neither did Amara. But what our heads didn’t know our bodies could feel: a She presence that came into the room, something thick and round, wide-bellied and dark. Not the so-called inferior-dark of white supremacy, nor the despised-feminine dark of patriarchy. This dark was a radiant-dark Mother Force, primordial and rich in beauty and mystery. Amara’s words had called open a portal and this spirit, House/Full of Black Women, was now with us at the table. With chills running up my spine I looked at her. “Yaaasss Amara, oh my god, YES.” She looked back at me with sharp eyes, her lips in pursed determination, and nodded her head three times, resolutely.

Dear Beloved House/Full, Mother of Black Woman Medicine
Who Restores and Transforms...

At first I watched from the sidelines, quietly stalking you while Amara joined forces with her long-time collaborator, the formidable Ellen Sebastian Chang. Together they gathered a circle of Black women who began showing up in places you would not expect to see them, doing things you would not expect to be done; shaking loose preconceived notions about what constitutes art, audience, theater and performance, making a place in the streets of Oakland for this new/not-new thing Amara had named Conjure Art.

At that time—in addition to the challenges of a chronic health condition and the heart-wrenching death of my mother a few years before—I was dealing with an extended crisis around housing and resources and so was usually too unwell to show up in person for the various House/Full “episodes” that were taking place around town. Instead, I mostly learned about you through girlfriend chats with Amara and photographs. Then one day Amara said to me, “we’re gonna do a 24-hour song circle for Black women.” Which sounded so glorious it made my eyeballs pop with excitement, until she finished her sentence with, “and I would like you to lead the opening prayer.” All I could say, with tears in my eyes was, “I can’t. I know you love me but I am not worthy of the job.” I can’t… because I spend my days feeling empty and lost, choking on despair. I can’t… because I am worn all the way down from the struggle of just barely making it. I can’t… because I don’t have anything of value to say to anyone right now, let alone a whole ass song circle full of Black women, who deserve the very best and should have an opening prayer...
from someone in far better shape than me... Amara let me cry talk for a while then leveled her gaze at me and said, “This is not a show. I am not asking you to perform. Just come as you are. I know you can’t see right now but I still see you. I know your power. I know your magic. Just come and speak what your tongue knows to be true: That’s all you have to do and it will be enough.”

And so I did that, brought my true tongue, unvarnished and vulnerable. At first it was hard because I felt so exposed with all my pain and struggle hanging offa me. But word by word I just kept going, feeling my way with authenticity as my touchstone. And I soon found out this was indeed enough. With the breath and bodies of all the women in the circle holding and supporting me, before I knew it I was in the flow of prayer and praise, no longer feeling broken; the magic had begun.

For the next 24 hours, 75 or so of us sang and danced... Never do you ask us to explain any aspect of the unique intersectional web of oppressions we each have to fight against every day as we do the endless work of challenging the structures of greed and what Ellen calls “the lies of whiteness”... You make a place for Black women pain is offered up to community, mending and tending, as together we stitch the fabric of renewal. For our people, for our ancestors, for ourselves and—whether they know it or not—for the world. While we tarry in your healing presence, the lost ones who work against our aims, the hungry ghosts who would rather dominate than love, feast on the entrails of their own rotting flesh, devouring themselves into annihilation. Some say House/Full performs. “Ha! We do not perform,” we whisper amongst ourselves. We pour libation to the Deep Dark Ground. Magnificent Joy, you are our bowl of sugar, our honey-wash cleansing. When the poisons of systemic racism and misogynoir have us confused about who we really are, you still see us. By the bright light of your gaze we learn to treasure one another when, through the eyes of a sister, we re-find truths we have forgotten we know. You remind us we deserve to be held, our stories honored. You insist we are worthy of being seen and heard, fully and with the deepest love.

Never do you ask us to explain any aspect of the unique intersectional web of oppressions we each have to fight against every day as we do the endless work of challenging the structures of greed and what Ellen calls “the lies of whiteness.” You make a place for Black woman pain is offered up to community, mending and tending, as together we stitch the fabric of renewal. For our people, for our ancestors, for ourselves and—whether they know it or not—for the world. While we tarry in your healing presence, the lost ones who work against our aims, the hungry ghosts who would rather dominate than love, feast on the entrails of their own rotting flesh, devouring themselves into annihilation. Some say House/Full performs. “Ha! We do not perform,” we whisper amongst ourselves. We pour libation to the Deep Dark Ground. Magnificent Joy, you are our bowl of sugar, our honey-water cleansing. When the poisons of systemic racism and misogynoir have us confused about who we really are, you still see us. By the bright light of your gaze we learn to treasure one another when, through the eyes of a sister, we re-find truths we have forgotten we know. You remind us we deserve to be held, our stories honored. You insist we are worthy of being seen and heard, fully and with the deepest love.

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didn’t wake up one day thinking I should create ritual costumes. They snuck up on me. They whispered to me, they brought magic into my home and drew me into their clutches. Those whispers came from a human most people know as Amara Tabor-Smith. In this article I share an inside peek into the approach I use to conceptualize and render ritual costumes in general and take a look at how that works in practice in my collaborations with House/Full of Black-Women Co-Creators Amara Tabor-Smith and Ellen Sebastian Cheng.

The starting point for a successful ritual costume process lies in drawing out a clarity of the intention behind the planned ritual performance and then breathing that intention into each step of the design and construction process. Ritual performance combines art and aesthetics as an instrument to inform viewers about beliefs, the constructs of our ancestral origins. It calls upon education and contemplation to understand diasporic experiences while honoring and retaining our cultures and grounding in our identities. It brings about perspectives that we might otherwise overlook, deny or refuse to see. It transforms... It is a digestion that can transform us.

You see, what I have learned about ritual costume design and creation is that it is in essence a guided process with spirit at its core. It is not based on perfect construction of the garment but rather a mindset born of an earnest desire to understand, honor and respect the traditions where they are derived. It is an openness to embark on a journey where you as the creator let go of ego to solely embrace the intent of those who will wear it, heightening awareness of the messages and materials that appear during the process of creating and then trusting that those materials showed up so you can integrate them in a meaningful way. It is as if spirit is guiding you through the process, telling you what to do—as long as you listen.

Costumes and fabric share a long history. French poet Charles Baudelaire’s phrasing of the essence of that relationship speaks for me: “fabrics speak a silent language.” RISD Museum expands that, speaking to the Egungung costumes I create: Its universal significance and applicability might sometimes be culturally specific, but in essence spans the entire gamut of our collective human experience. Though it has no voice, cloth speaks in complex, multisensory fashions.

The ritual costume serves as a dramatically symbolic vessel carrying a story all its own while holding space for embodiment of spirit. It is an instrument called to action that is imbued in the fabric of intention whereby we can carry out those intentions with respect to the world, our fellows, ourselves and our traditional beliefs. They hold a backbone of courage that dares to hold truth through subliminal messages, alluring layers with complex meaning carried on the backs of channelers. They are a canvas for the integration of symbolic references, for spirit and woven in the fabric of life’s journeys. They recall ancestral guides deepening our awareness and bringing forth new perspectives in moving forward. They are a protective womb of safety to release the injuries of the past and move forward toward healing.

THE CONCEPT

My process of conceptualization draws inspiration from various points during development. There are typically portions of Amara’s and Ellen’s projects where they are clear in their vision while other parts that remain open, providing room for improvisation. As they tell the story underlying the performance, it gives rise to strong visions of the setting within me. Their explanations evoke a series of symbols, metaphorical relationships, spiritual overtones/undertones, objects, textiles, organic matter, texture that seem to appear within my mind. Having
those representing the treasured values of Egungun traditions, or art. Aa re represents a conscious attempt “to select, choose, discriminate, or discern” (Yai, 1994) while being cognizant of the historical past. Quite logically, artists-priests-devotees use their own oba (design consciousness) together with omo iwa (inner eye or artistic insight and sensibility) as well as laakaye (intuitive knowledge) plus imoja-mora (unusual sensitivity) in order to make deliberate choices (Abodun, 1989; Lawal, 1996) in the selection of colors, patterns, and designs. This dynamic artistic process is constantly inventive, revitalizing, and modern. The result is that the cloth panels come in a multiplicity of designs, patterns, hues, shapes, and colors—a curious blend of disparate elements fully reflective of the multidimensional vision and power of departed ancestors.1

WHAT IS EGUNGUN? The Egungun plays a prominent recurring role in the community, which together becomes the vessel to achieve the intention to the audience that the directors articulated weeks or months before the performance. The RISD Museum offers one of my favorite descriptions: Made into elaborate decorative patterns, forms, and colors, these carefully arranged fabrics must follow the well-established conventions of the past; best defined here as those representing the treasured values of Egungun traditions, or art. Aa re represents a conscious attempt “to select, choose, discriminate, or discern” (Yai, 1994) while being cognizant of the historical past. Quite logically, artists-priests-devotees use their own oba (design consciousness) together with omo iwa (inner eye or artistic insight and sensibility) as well as laakaye (intuitive knowledge) plus imoja-mora (unusual sensitivity) in order to make deliberate choices (Abodun, 1989; Lawal, 1996) in the selection of colors, patterns, and designs. This dynamic artistic process is constantly inventive, revitalizing, and modern. The result is that the cloth panels come in a multiplicity of designs, patterns, hues, shapes, and colors—a curious blend of disparate elements fully reflective of the multidimensional vision and power of departed ancestors.1

THE COSTUME

The moment I live for is when the performer puts on the finished costume for the first time. Embodying the character in the costume brings the costume alive and the costume transforms the spirit of the performer, which together become the vessel to deliver the essence of the costume. In my design process, Amara’s identification of the purpose informs the final phase of the costume design. The costume followed by a general understanding that is held by all to support who they are in whatever way that they are able, identifying fabrics, style that support their movement. From the undergarment I think in layers, what needs to be completed over that undergarment to achieve the silhouette. Once the scenes are laid out, other specific effects emerge driving costume design, such as the number of performers per scene, who is cast in those roles, what the set will look like, the amount and type of movement, what function they will support in the story line. Now specific deity references enter the process which informs the essence of costume character such as Mother of the Ocean gods, Black/White Woman, and so forth. The directors said they wanted a “bom dress.” Curiously, I wasn’t shocked. They told me the story of a young woman aboard a slave trader ship who was ordered—and who refused—to dance for the crew. So they bound her to a halyard, hoisted her up into the sky and dropped her to the deck, again and again long after she perished. When Amara and Ellen retold this story at each rehearsal, I could see my body being hoisted, followed by the free falling weightless emptiness only to crash in blinding pain. This sensation imprinted itself in my soul. This bone dress was to honor this young woman’s spirit, to tell her story, to set her free. This was a call to scream in anger, it needed to cry in pain, it needed strength held deep in principle, it needed an ocean’s sway, it needed air for spirit to flow through it, it needed to hold the echo of ghosts, it needed the allure of beauty followed by a recoiling to the ugly, ugly truth.

ANATOMY OF A RITUAL COSTUME

Garment construction begins with a visualization process. I mentally visualize the entire set design and look feel while thinking about how costumes might punctuate the space. I ask how the performers will move through the space, how much movement will there be, what is solo or part of a larger group in movement? From there I can see the silhouette of the costume from the entire understand- ing of the overall construction. Typically starting from the base garment or garment that is closest to the character. That defines what will work best in terms of form and function. What would be most comfortable, identifying fabrics, style that support their movement. From the undergarment I think in layers, what needs to be completed over that undergarment to achieve the silhouette. Through the combined integration of each layer that imbues the costume in preparation for the ritual performance. This includes the collaborative collection of meaningful fabrics and objects, ritualistic processes often used to create the objects, spiritual practices in placing the objects—all with clear intention throughout.

INSIDE THE EXPERIENCE

The feeling I get when entering a rehearsal space can only be described as like entering a remote island, a village, with people who share a deep love, compassion and acceptance for each other focused on the positive aspects of the gifts that each person brings. The space holds a respect that is beyond words where each individual feels to be their authentic selves and are able to express in a way that is grounded at a level that allows them to share who they are in whatever way that they truly are. There is a grace, a gentleness and understanding that is held by all to support each other in a way that I’ve not experienced in the outside world. It feels to me that it is a world that existed in the past, a world as all worlds should be based in a love for each other that we as human beings have lost along the way, making it feel unsafe to be our authentic selves.

My experience with House/Full has been grounding. It has given me a perspective rooted in extremes: one like a raw open wound to another of unlimited power to express. It has afforded me the opportunity to understand deep pain and pure joy—sometimes together. Doing so widens my awareness not only about others but also within myself. It can be uncomfortable at times but looking back over the years my understanding of my place in this world, what I bring, where I fall short and how I can use what I have as best as possible to help others continues to become more and more clear. That clarity about who you are and what you bring helps to inform all choices you make with clear intention.

I never thought that making costumes would open a door into such a rich life jour- ney. But I often think that I have the best job in the world as I am able to intimately collaborate with highly talented artists that process life in a deeply profound way, dig into the roots of understanding ancestral history and traditions, gain a perspective on history and humanity. I find the Abidun’s aspects and create tangible references that can support visual impacts to provoke ques- tions, become intimate, and more importantly promote healing and celebrate our existence. What can be better than this?

UNTIL THE NEXT TIME... It’s been great to have a chance to write about and bring words to my work—a space that ordinarily has precious few of those. I would like to take this opportunity to express thanks to the Bay Area ritual dance community, the directors and dancers, for inviting me into your sacred midst. I consider myself privileged to be a member. Looking forward to seeing you all in a theater as soon as we are able!

DANA KAWANO is an award-winning Ritual Costume Designer, Scenes/Installation and Visual Artist who has worked with artists like Amara Tabor Smith, Ellen Sebastian Chang, Dohle Lee, Yayoi Kambara, and others. She is versed in a multitude of artistic mediums. Her focus is to create visual landscapes of elaborate wearable and/or scenic art that incorporate textiles, found materials and traditional mediums while integrating cultural/visual language to tell the story.

REFERENCES


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WORKS CITED

House/Full of Black Women has been built in episodes over a five-year period, sustaining a question posed by Ellen Sebastian Chang and Amara Tabor-Smith: “How can we as Black women and girls find a space to breathe and be well within a stable home?” While I had known Ellen since the late 1980s and Amara for a decade, I met their shared project – as I am often introduced to projects – in a grant proposal. It was described as a site-specific ritual performance examining issues of displacement, well-being, and sex trafficking of Black women and girls in Oakland.

I’m always interested in artists tackling difficulty and defying categories, and House/Full certainly did that. It wasn’t going to be a single event but sustained over a long time. It wasn’t going to be a piece for a repertoire: likely its sections would be shared once. It wasn’t going to be distinctly contemporary or traditional in form. It wasn’t driven by a single arts organization but porous to contributions by Chapter 510 Ink; Eastside Arts Alliance; Regina’s Door (a boutique dedicated to protecting women from trafficking); and others. It was going to encompass ritual, dance, theater, procession, film, and even sleeping. One artist was not “the lead” – Ellen and Amara described one another as “my art wife.”

The piece dissolved boundaries between indoors and outdoors, performance and ceremony, between the ordinary and the transcendent; and it combined those who were initiated in a spiritual practice and those who were not. Participants moved in and out of the piece, following a singular and communal path to healing.

Can I admit how much this work challenges and compels me? I have seen two of the episodes live and viewed excerpts of others through documentation. In my memories of sections and excerpts, I feel as if I have dreamed them. I’ve also taken notes. I heard what I heard. My memories, my hearing may be in error. I will tell you about a few episodes.

IN TRIBUTE TO TRANSFORMATION

BY FRANCES PHILLIPS
I

I struggle to fold a spiritual dimension into my daily life. The religious observances of my childhood were not overtly about “the spiritual.” They were composed of Protestant church-going and occasional pot-lucks. For two years, we lived in a small town in Massachusetts, if we didn’t go to church, neighbors would turn up at the door with casseroles, assuming we were too ill to get out of bed. My father was impatient with “church people.” He saw them as gossips.

When I first met Ellen Sebastian, she was co-founder and artistic director of Life on Earth on the Water. She had written and directed, Your Place Is No Longer with Us, which took place in a Victorian mansion. The audience moved through the house for the performance and, at the end, she served them black-eyed peas, cornbread, and mustard greens. Later, Amara Tabor-Smith served the CounterPulse audience vegan cornbread and gumbo at performances of Our Daily Bread. They had in common these histories of performing acts of caring, breaking out of “the theatrical,” expressing heritage through food and in distinctive spaces.

HouseFull of Black Women has moved inside and out of spaces that were transformed to be more than sets or frames. Most vivid to me — perhaps because it is the episode that the Creative Work Fund partially supported — were the spaces for sleeping and dreaming at Chapter 510 Ink in Oakland. An installation in a storefront window for resting. A rocking chair. Women positioned themselves. Some recline. Some watch over others. The aesthetic is tenderness. A hallway is lined with cotton. It’s hard not to touch the fragility, the suggestion of the sky and clouds and dreaming.

II

Chapter 510 Ink is a writing center for youth, and young women read pieces they have written about selves and fear and comfort. I remember thinking they were brave — revealing. Later I wondered about the symbolism of the cotton balls. This 2017 episode of HouseFull of Black Women, “Black Women Dreaming,” wasn’t the first section. It was informed, in part, by one of the women’s radiograms, creating a time and place for Black women to rest, recognizing the likelihood that they are justifiable jobs and raising children and healing others. Black women could sign up to sleep for between two and ten hours at a West Oakland boarding house, where they would be met with beverages and food as well as comfortable resting places. One hundred and eighty women chose to sleep and dream for the project.

Lately, at a grantmaking conference, Amara and Ellen asked a room full of funders why “being well rested” wasn’t acceptable as a measurable outcome.

III

In grants we grab onto words and overuse them for three years or longer until they lose their power and then we grab onto new words. Two thoughts that I believe we are about to release are engagement and immersive. How, then, do I find the right words for HouseFull’s capacity to transform me into more than a witness? It happens here:

The dance is in her shoulders. She is leaning back. Her angel-open face to the sky. Draped in white. The dancer places her hand on the shoulder of a seated performer as if to comfort her, as if to tell her “It’s time.”

She bends over backwards and rises like a floating bird. I try to identify the bird being portrayed and read, “Drag is higher in rotational motion of the wings.” That’s in contrast, an ornithologist writes, to gliding.

The dancer claims slow, rotational motion. When she crouches, her hand is jiggling. An invitation and a warning. Then her body buckles as if she is trying to eject something. Another dancer on the floor in blue.

The third dancer is shaking in her shoulders and her whole being falls back. The momentum quickens. The women sitting against the wall cry, laugh, yelp. Then singing:

“Black crow/black crow/please hear my cry 
Black crow/black crow/I’m calling for you.”

IV

We’re in the alley behind the Eastside Arts Alliance. Women are scrubbing white fabric in shallow galvanized buckets. Amara is keening with her arms full of white, washed fabric.

My mother’s mother was very beautiful as a young woman and engaged to marry a man who “left her at the altar.” This was in a small town, and the shame of it was known by all. So, a week later, after meeting a man in the street, she married him and put that shame behind her. That was when the real pain came. They had five children — four sons and my mother, the middle child. I’ve been told that when the older sons would hear their father coming home from a night of drinking, they would awaken their mother and run her out into the woods to save her from being beaten.

I never knew that grandfather. He abandoned the family when my mother was 18. While he never beat his daughter, she carried the burden of his brutality and her mother’s fear. We’ll continue to carry it.

That abuse is small in the context of the women who have lived through trafficking. The 2019 episode “Slowly, Cautiously,” is a container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material, from the container for such a range of material. Women who have lived through trafficking.

While he never beat his daughter, she carried the burden of his brutality and her mother’s fear. We’ll continue to carry it.

VI

I’ve been intimidated to write about this work. That may be because I’ve grown so fond of Ellen and Amara and want to get it right, but I am intimidated before them. Given the frame, the ambition of House/ Full of Black Women, it could fall in upon itself. Its leading to the women’s healed could appear contrived. How does it not? I was raised to believe that simple ideas were ineffective. It’s not a genuine, a genuine, a genuine.

In the middle of my journal is this note: “Those who walk with the dead and the sea cannot fear either one.”

FRANCES PHILLIPS is program director for the Arts for Creative Work Fund. Prior to her work in philanthropy, she was executive director of Intersections for the Arts. A poet, she is the author of three small press books.
There, don’t nobody question you sittin’ between another woman’s legs when she plaitin’ your hair. There, she ain’t gotta be “My cousin. My roommate. My soror.” She can be “My baby.” She can be “My familiar.” She can be, “My Harriet. My Nina. My Audre.” She can be, simply and finally yours. There, not every woman undressing you with her eyes is somebody you gotta beat down or measure up. There, if you can just get back there, everything is “it’s just how women are here.”

There, ain’t a devil or a God telling you how wrong your urges are. There, ain’t no preacher tellin’ you what God want you to put in your thing. There, what comes out of your thing is not a lie, it’s a life. There, it’s the potential of life. There, it’s the reminder of life. There, it’s the reminder of life. There, it’s the reminder of life. There, ain’t no bottles of gin reparative therapy. There, ain’t no hair falling out. There, ain’t like pulling teeth to get a honest answer and ain’t no question you should acquiesce to someone else, the answer to yourself.

There, we machetes. There, no red tape. There, cut to the chase. There, freedom close to the quick. There, we pencils. There, we archive and witness. There, our bodies journal. There, every name of every woman called is an offering to every woman. There, there, there, ain’t no fallen woman. Just a woman pushed down when she wasn’t looking.

There, she ain’t askin’ you to love him, make a baby with him, or make his dreams your dreams. There, you don’t get taken if you don’t take. There, is a way. There, is something about you. There, there girl. There, we are.

There, we are conjoined. There, we not bled. There, we blood. There, we are made family, we are a family. There, we a spice rack. There, we a blended family. There, now. There, can be more than one woman in the house. There, we can open each other’s pots. There, we don’t say what’s missing. There, we say what’s missing out. There, to let it all go to seed, to return to stillness, to knowing stillness not being the same as waiting or feeling overlooked or impatient, or inanimate, or thinking born better than formed, there, wanting to be born so bad, and forgetting that nothing in the earth is imprisoned or gone, there, to stand up to God and say, possibly, impossibly, “I ended up a black woman. Better yet, I ended up in a House/Full of BlackWomen. And I won.”

MARVIN K. WHITE, MDiv, is currently serving as the Full-time Minister of Celebration at GLIDE Church in San Francisco. He is a graduate of The Pacific School of Religion, where he earned a MDiv. He is the author of four collections of poetry: *Our Name Be Witness*; *Status*; and the two Lammy-nominated collections *last rights* and *nothin’ ugly fly*. He was named one of YBCA’s “100” in 2019. He is articulating a vision of social, prophetic and creative justice through his work as a poet, artist, teacher, collaborator, preacher, cake baker, and Facebook Statustician.
Let’s face it. Pretty much everything, as we know it, has changed. So much of what we believed to be true and invested in is collapsing before our very eyes. As we pivot away from extractive systems of capitalism, built on false foundations of white psychosis and patriarchy, a new set of tools is required to support us in navigating the shift and bringing our true gifts to the world. The good news is, as BIPOC communities, many of these tools are already embedded within us as part of our ancestral legacy and tradition—IF we choose to activate them. Being a member of #HouseFullofBlackWomen has been part of my ritual of activation. It has given me the space to heal, to be seen, and to reconnect to the wisdom of who I truly am. Little did I realize when I joined this project years ago, how much I would rely on this tribe for support during these times. It continues to buoy my spirit and remind me that we are not performing, we are midwives, ushering in the greatest paradigm shift of our lifetimes, conjuring on behalf of Mother Earth, who we owe so much to but have given so little. This is what has inspired this video, to remind people that although death is inevitable it doesn’t have to be the end. Let the rebirth begin!

Zakiya Harris affectionately known as Sh8peshifter, is a woman who has truly charted her own path in life. A Cultural Architect, she has over 2 decades of experience working at the intersections of Art, Activism and Spiritual Entrepreneurship. Zakiya is the co-founder of nationally recognized projects Impact Hub Oakland, Grind for the Green and a past Fellow of Green For All and Bold Food. Currently she serves as the Co-Founder + Senior Advisor at Hack the Hood, an award-winning non-profit that introduces low-income youth of color to careers in tech by hiring and training them to build websites for real small businesses in their own communities. Zakiya is the published author of Sh8peshift Your Life: The Creative Entrepreneurs Guide to Self Love, Self Mastery and Fearless Self Expression.
The Hula Must Go On
SAT, Oct 17, 2020 • 7:00-8:00pm

We

we stolen            we sorrow
we shot as we run like deer as we run
we root              we thrum
we drip               we die            we blues
we by every mean
we reckon the wrought
you wreak
we lay in wait        we know you
can’t escape          we all mighty
we ran free
we forced to flee
we ain’t your boy     we black girl
joy                   we the poetry
we the pearl          we the patriots
the people,

MAURYA KERR is a bay area-based dancer, choreographer, educator, writer, and the artistic director of tiny pistol.
We was originally published in Hole in The Head Review.
COMMUNITY

DANCE MISSION THEATER – GRRRL BRIGADE
Sep 10–Oct 15.

CALIFORNIA DANCE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
Get Connected: California Dance Education Association serves emerging, practicing and master dance artists, teachers and scholars through advocacy and professional development.

FULL OUT STUDIOS
Offering Outdoor and Virtual Classes (Mon-Sat)

DANCE FOR PD®
Designed specifically for individuals with Parkinson’s Disease and their spouses, family members, friends, and caregivers while addressing PD-specific concerns such as balance, flexibility, coordination, isolation, and depression.

SF Ballet
Marin Dance Theatre
Danspace
Find more

ODC
The ODC Healthy Dancers Clinic is offering an array of online workshops, panels, and pre-recorded videos for free throughout September in celebration of the Month for Dancers’ Health.

BALLET FOLKLÓRICO MÉXICO DANZA
Originally an after-school program intended to provide a safe place for children, Ballet Folklórico México Danza has flourished for nearly 30 years by encouraging students to love dance and appreciate Mexican culture.

TANNERY WORLD DANCE & CULTURAL CENTER
 Diaspora Performance Project seeks to support a thriving community of Artists of the African Diaspora, providing opportunities for performance, the development of new work, and deep & meaningful connection to the community. Offers online classes from Diaspora Artists.

FESTIVAL OF LATIN AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY CHOREOGRAPHERS
Sep 16 - Nov 11, 4pm PST, FLACC 2020: EL GRITO Resistant, queer, indigenous, international and hybrid choreographers of the Latinx diaspora raising their voices every Wednesday on Zoom and Facebook Live.

AFRO URBAN SOCIETY
Bakanal de Afrique 2020: ‘Mi Soon Come’
Fri, Nov 6-Sat, Nov 28, where Pan Afro Urban artists converge for a month-long, virtual festival exploring the significance of transportation in communities and culture.

DANCE-A-VISION
Cultivating a thriving community for over 35 years. Learn more about Carla Service and Dance-A-Vision Entertainment.

DANCE-A-VISION
Virtual fall classes for children, youth, and adults, including: composition for kids ages 8+, composition for adults with Mary Armentrout, pointe and pre-pointe for adults.

RoCo
RoCo hosts 175 classes weekly at their two locations in Marin County including an entirely Outdoor Program for Youth through November 21st and Online classes for Adults taught by the Bay Area’s finest instructors.
COMMUNITY

WORLD ARTS WEST
NEW INTERVIEW SERIES
In partnership with Eastside Arts Alliance and NAKA Dance Theater, Live Arts in Resistance, focuses on social justice work. Season 2 of Living Traditions, Exploring Dance Beyond the Performance in October, introduces artists beyond Northern CA.

ZACCHO DANCE THEATRE
Celebrating 40 Years: Zaccho Dance Theatre presents performance work that investigates dance as it relates to place, while also offering community engagement, arts education, and youth performance programming.

Performing Arts Academy of Marin
PAAM provides dance, theater arts, youth musicals and summer programs that equip young performers with a well-rounded arts education and confidence.

Academy of Danse Libre
Academy of Danse Libre performs a variety of pieces from the 19th and early 20th centuries in authentic period attire.

A. SPEARMAN & CO.
A. Spearman & Co. is a contemporary fusion dance company that seeks to design and create unique vocabularies of performance.

CONTACT IMPROVISATION-INSPIRED WEEKLY SCORE & JAM
Organized by Zach Pine
Saturdays at 9:45 am-11 am.
Creativity, playfulness, physicality, and connection. Breakout rooms to facilitate interaction.

DIABLO BALLET
2020-21 season subscriptions now available featuring The Nutcracker Suite, Coppélia, Carousel (A Dance) and new works.

TAMALPA INSTITUTE
Sep-Nov 2020
Online workshops introducing the Tamalpa Life/Art Process. Use movement, drawing, and writing to tap into art’s symbolic language to explore current life themes and generate new resources. Find more details on their calendar.

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PHOTO BY RJ MUNA
PHOTO BY ARIS BERNALES

COMMUNITY
TURFinc
Empowering youth through the movement and culture of TURF dancing.

LIKHA PILIPINO FOLK
Celebrating Philippine Culture and Tradition

KIMIKO GUTHRIE
Congratulations to Dandelion Dance Theater co-founder Kimiko Guthrie on her debut novel, *Black Seventeen*—a timely tale shaped by Guthrie’s mother’s experience of internment during WWII.

ALICIA THE DANCE DRAGON SLAYER
Offers wildly fun and exuberant Diaspora Dance classes (outdoors and online) as well as transformative coaching for anyone who has ever experienced doubts or fears about dance.

SOUL SANCTUARY DANCE
Sundays at 11am-1pm.
Live Interactive Online Soul Sanctuary Dance. A weekly uplifting gathering featuring wide-ranging music, freestyle movement, and connection.

ANTOINE HUNTER
Artist and Arts Activist who established platforms for Deaf and Hard of Hearing artists through Urban Jazz Dance Company and the annual Bay Area International Deaf Dance Festival.

CID PEARLMAN PERFORMANCE
Congratulations to Cid on being awarded a Rydell Visual Arts Fellowship at Community Foundation Santa Cruz.

DESTINY ARTS CENTER
Inspiring and igniting social change through the arts, *The Black W(h)ole* is a healing, celebratory film experience which mourns and honors the lives of six young people who died in and around Oakland before the age of 32.

MONA KHAN COMPANY
Their virtual doors are open. Classes and workshops for kids, teens and adults as well as custom classes and packages for groups and corporate events.

Los Lupeños de San José
CELEBRATING 50 YEARS IN PHOTOS

IN THE GROOVE STUDIOS
Bay Area’s Top Hip Hop Dance Instruction and more. Visit their website for news and updates

ANTOINE HUNTER
Artist and Arts Activist who established platforms for Deaf and Hard of Hearing artists through Urban Jazz Dance Company and the annual Bay Area International Deaf Dance Festival. With DropLabs, he recently released innovative shoes that allow people to feel music.

FOLK DANCE FEDERATION OF CALIFORNIA
Monthly Online Folk Dance Parties
The Folk Dance Federation of California promotes the art and education of international folk dance.

LINES
One for You, One for Me Program:
Students can add a few dollars to their own paid tuition to add to a “bank” of paid classes for others who don’t have the resources right now. No applications, no hassle, just make a request.

ANTEoine Hunter
Artist and Arts Activist who established platforms for Deaf and Hard of Hearing artists through Urban Jazz Dance Company and the annual Bay Area International Deaf Dance Festival. With DropLabs, he recently released innovative shoes that allow people to feel music.
**OUT OF TOUCH**

by ROWENA RICHIE

**Part 1**

“Secretly I want to be ‘Amma’ a.k.a. ‘the hugging saint,’ the Indian spiritual leader who goes around the world giving hugs to millions of people. I want to midwife life after COVID-19, to bring people back into their bodies.” —APRIL 20, 2020

When I wrote that in my journal in mid-April I was already grieving the loss of touch. I had no idea we were going to be “out of touch” for so long. No idea just how traumatic the loss of touch would be for so many. I never expected to mourn my dad's death from cancer against the backdrop of a pandemic.

Now it's mid-August. Last night was the first time since shelter in place that I hugged someone outside of my family bubble: Ryan Tacata, a collaborator and dear friend. Ryan, Erika Chong Shuch and I “Zoom” several hours a week. We have a performance-making collective called For You that has been very active remotely. But we have not been in the same physical space since February. Today Ryan is moving to Vancouver, British Columbia to start a new job. Last night Erika and I went to Ryan's to wave goodbye. We gathered outside. “Can I have a hug?” Ryan asked through his mask. “Fuck yea,” I exclaimed through my mask, adrenaline rushing in.

This morning when I cheerfully announced that I hugged Ryan I was met with head-shaking disapproval from my husband Ed. To be fair, Ed adores Ryan. This wasn't about Ryan, this was about Ed and I not always being on the same page when it comes to “proper” coronavirus behavior. A few weeks ago we went on an off-the-grid retreat. We gave each other calming massages. We took a long, sunny walk in a nature preserve where we encountered a group of ponies. A gray pony approached us and rubbed its muzzle against my outstretched hand. I patted the pony's cheek. Then it bent down and bit my ankle. No blood, but totally alarming. I shielded myself with the umbrella I'd been carrying as a parasol and we swiftly backed away.

“Perhaps a fitting metaphor for the virus,” Ed later remarked. “Don’t get too close or it might bite you.”
Part 2

Eli Nelson and Christian Burns were two of the last people I danced with pre-pandemic. It was during the Practice, an improvisation group that I had joined before the pandemic. It was a form of choreography.

Six inches above the floor, my face exploring Christian’s palm / Draping backwards over Eli’s shoulder, one leg on the air / A tettaring tango with Eli, falling into and catching each other / Breathing back-to-back with romace / On all fours, a hand between my scalpula.

I reached out to Christian and Eli by email. I wanted to know if they were missing touch, too.

Christian, a faculty member of the LINES Ballet degree and training programs, responded that he had no dance-based contact with any- one since COVID. But he taught virtual classes and has experienced what he calls “direct inner contact with partners.” For Christian, the ques- tions have been a way to help his students—and himself—adapt to these touchless times. “Teaching via distance has been strangely interesting and felt vital to support my students in such a time of need,” he said. He calls this remote teaching and inner contact a kind of “emotional triage.”

“All the moments of connection that we take for granted carry more significance now,” Eli, a dancer, composer and University of San Francisco educator, replied. “Someone brushed by me in the supermarket and my body had a mixed series of reactions: revulsion, upset, enjoy-

Part 3

Erika’s mom Suk lives a few miles away from Erika’s family and is like a third parent to her 7-year-old grandson Wakes. On the phone Suk told me, “Our family is very touchy with Wakes.” Quarantine prohibited Suk from seeing Wakes. So, Wakes made a pillow in the shape of his hand that attempted to satisfy Suk’s loss of all physical touch. Suk would place her hand on top of Wakes’ pillow hand and try to feel him.” Touch is like her first language,” Erika said.

Erika was afraid it was not only hurting Suk’s heart not to see Wakes, but her mind was getting cloudy. “Humans have brain pathways that are specifically dedicated to detecting affectionate touch,” Johannes Eichstaedt, a social scientist and psychology professor at Stanford University explained in “How to Hug During a Pandemic,” an article that appeared in The New York Times in June. Eichstaedt said it bare: “Affective touch is how our biological systems communicate to one another that we are safe, that we are loved, and that we are not alone.”

Not only has Suk spent much of the pandemic unable to touch Wakes, but unable to see him. She doesn’t do Zoom or FaceTime. And the toll has been high. Suk told me that when she couldn’t be with Wakes physi-

Part 4

According to the article “How to Hug During a Pandemic” the safest thing to do is not hug. But if you’re like me, you need a hug. In the article aerosol scientist and airborne disease transmission expert Linsey Marr spells out the safest way to do that:

Part 6

My dad had this epiphanic vision a few days before he passed, like something from a Gaga class: a silk scarf slowly floating down and com- pletely covering him. He lowered his hand fluttering his fingers gently to illustrate “Guidance,” “Shielding.” He asked me “Is that what we are?” I think it meant. He wanted us to bring him a silk scarf to the hospital. Mom and I put one in a plastic bag with his name and room number on it and dropped it off at the front door of the hospital. Because of COVID we weren’t allowed to visit him. The silk scarf ended up symbolizing the permanent kind of “total healing.” Leaving the bones on the earth. But he didn’t go alone or untouched. His attending nurse Stephen put his job on the line to let us all into the hospital—my mom, my par- ents’ past tense, the rest of their lives, siblings, in laws, grandchildren—my dad receiving us all like Amma, “the hugging saint,” to give us the comfort of hugging him goodbye. He squeezed my hand so hard I thought I would never let it go. It was the last time I ever let it go. We had the privilege of receiving the touch of Dad’s last breath.

And maybe that’s the thing that has been so hard about coronavirus. We didn’t know it was going to be the last touch or hug or dance or time or trip. We still don’t know when it will end.

As shelter in place wore on Suk worried that Wakes might have out- grown how he hugged the scarf of the silen dancer, in place, after gradually introducing safely distanced visits with masks, Suk and Wakes had their first hug. Erika captured it on video. I was so moved watching it. I gave goosebumps now remembering it. From the second they tenta- tively roll each into one on the mat where they have been playing 6 feet apart, Wakes claps with joy. “The first time we’ve gotten to hug in a long time!” He beams, arms shung around Suk’s neck. Suk laughs and sallows and catches him tight and long to make sure she’s not dreaming.

Coda: Watch the Artists & Elders, “gift” that emerged from the exchange between Suk and filmmaker and dancer Gabriel Diamond. ROWENA richie has been a dance theater-maker and performer in San Francisco for 25 years. For 19 of them she has been collaborating with Erika Chong Shu. Rowena also writes essays about dance and leads senior fitness classes. She recently completed an Atlantic Fellowship for Equity in Brain Health and is working on a series of projects that promote positive aging.
How Much Should I Pay?

by KATIE TAYLOR

WHAT DOES IT MEAN To pay for the things that you value? On this topic, I’m full of questions and have no answers.

Since Danspace (where I teach and work) launched virtual zoom classes, we’ve offered a variety of payment options, always including “no one turned away for lack of funds.” The priorities of both the school’s director and owners have both been to keep paying our faculty and staff as we were before the shelter-in-place order. We don’t require any payment to access the classes. Even with the option to not pay, every single student has paid something, and many have paid more than what we’ve asked as a way to support our school and teachers. Zoom dance class doesn’t work for everyone, but of the students we continue to see in class, nearly everyone has mentioned the value and benefit they have received from class. I have been incredibly moved and grateful for all the support and engagement we’ve had during this time.

Mary Amstegroff moved her Feldenkrais practice online shortly after the shelter-in-place order. Those offerings have been available at an “extreme sliding scale” with a suggested range. In her email with class information, she offers the option to pay more to cover folks who can’t pay or can’t pay as much. In participating in those classes, I’ve paid toward the upper end of the range ($20), because I can afford to pay $20 for class, I would have paid $20 (and maybe more) if attending the same offering in person, and because I value and benefit from Mary making these available while we’re all at home. Is $20 the right amount? Should it be more? What amount reflects the value of the benefit I get from this experience?

The things that have been saving me during shelter in place have been movement practices that I wasn’t normally engaging in during the “time before” shelter in place: a 30 minute twice per week tabata class led by a friend who is also a personal trainer and a Bollywood class led by a friend of my aunt’s who is just starting her dance teaching practice. Both of these started as “pay what you can, if you want” (the Bollywood class is now $11 per class). I normally pay what I consider a pretty low class rate ($15). If it’s only me at the tabata class I pay $20 since it feels like a private training. Mel (the trainer/teacher) joked that whatever money I pay goes right back to Danspace anyway.

My sister and my aunt both came to Mel’s class. Both asked “how much should I pay?” I still don’t know the answer to that, so I told them what I paid and said “but you can pay whatever you can/want to.” She doesn’t have a recommended price.” So how do you decide how much to pay?

On Saturday, June 27 I attended dNaga’s free showing of their dance film Mom & Me: The Warrior Heart. The audience was very engaged (the Q&A went on for a long time, with thoughtful questions and reflections about what mothers of all kinds have given to us). I was incredibly moved by several parts, and had this show gone as planned (in person, in May, at Laney College), I would have either been in attendance as front of house or I would have paid for a ticket. So when a link was dropped in the chat to donate, I paid a ticket price plus a little more ($25). Was that the “right” amount to contribute? Given the incredibly hard work, additional costs to produce a film (in place of an in-person performance), what is the amount that honors the labor, the artistic practice, and the value I got from being able to experience it?

In all of these instances, I am also in relationship with the folks I am paying. Does that inspire more thoughtfulness about how much I should pay? Does it matter that they also pay me for my work in different instances? Does it matter that we all get value from getting to share our work with one another (while we try to support ourselves financially with it)? What would it mean to always be in deep consideration about what I can afford and what it’s worth when paying for anything?

I haven’t lost any income during this time, which I think is an important context for my thinking and considerations. Dansers’ Group has been incredibly supportive of staff and my teaching practice shifted, but my overall earnings from this have stayed the same. Some summer income/pick-up teaching gigs didn’t happen, but I have savings to support that loss for this year.

None of my decisions, behaviors, or thinking is meant to be prescriptive or taken as a recommendation. This is simply my thinking and choices in this time, at this time. I assume it will continue to evolve as I learn more and think more about how to try and line up my values within a capitalist system that demands that we show how much we value something by what we’re willing to pay for it.

KATIE TAYLOR is a dancer and teacher on faculty at Danspace in Oakland, and she manages the Adult Division program, supporting brand-new, returning, and experienced adult students in their dance education. In addition, Katie is also the associate director at Dansers’ Group.
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