



WINTER 2021

indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.12 What's in a Conversation?



P.23 Preserving, Building, Connecting



P.40 Grassroots to Cyberspace

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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.

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Pictured: Detour Dance presents *The Nelken Line*, see page 11

WELCOME



WE LIVE IN A TIME WHERE LOVE COSTS.

As an example, I love this country but do I love all the people here?

The cost is to feel fully. The cost is to believe that no matter what's going on in the world there will be grief, goodness, ugliness, rebellion, confusion and love. As the lyrics to the song go, "[what the world needs now is love sweet love...](#)"

This is some of what I spend my time thinking about - love. Even during a pandemic, especially during a pandemic. The complexities of gaining and losing love guide me to understand that, as the song lyrics go, "[it's been a long time comin' but I know, oh-ooo-oh, a change is gon' come](#)"

Here are my current love-actions as a way to try and adapt to this time.

Love means that I'm prepared to let go to move forward

I can love not being perfect, and therefore I can let go of judgements

I acknowledge my connections to white supremacy, and still love myself

I can let go of these words: professional, best, new, winning, losing

I share these love-actions not as resolutions, not to motivate. They are only words. I wonder how much I'll falter at my attempt to put any one of these into action? Oodles.

Now to what's inside this winter issue of *In Dance*: let me simply state that I love each of the stories, images, ideas, conversations and communities that are featured within. Often I try to figure out a clever way to write about dance. And today I let myself simply love these words about dance. The simplest moments are often the hardest to convey. Is it because they are the closest to our truth? What we value most?

Join me in taking a deep breath. Let's feel the truth in what we love, who we love. I know for certain that love can be risky and yet I believe that it's our time, dance's time, to be loved more.

Love your dance more. And if you already do then love someone's else's dance more.

Now it's time for me to imagine getting ready to go to the disco. I'm putting on my sexy pants with spangles and adjusting my makeup, and mask, and I hear Madonna belt out "[cause love's gonna lift me up.](#)"

Enjoy each loving word crafted for you.

—Wayne Hazzard, Artist Administrator

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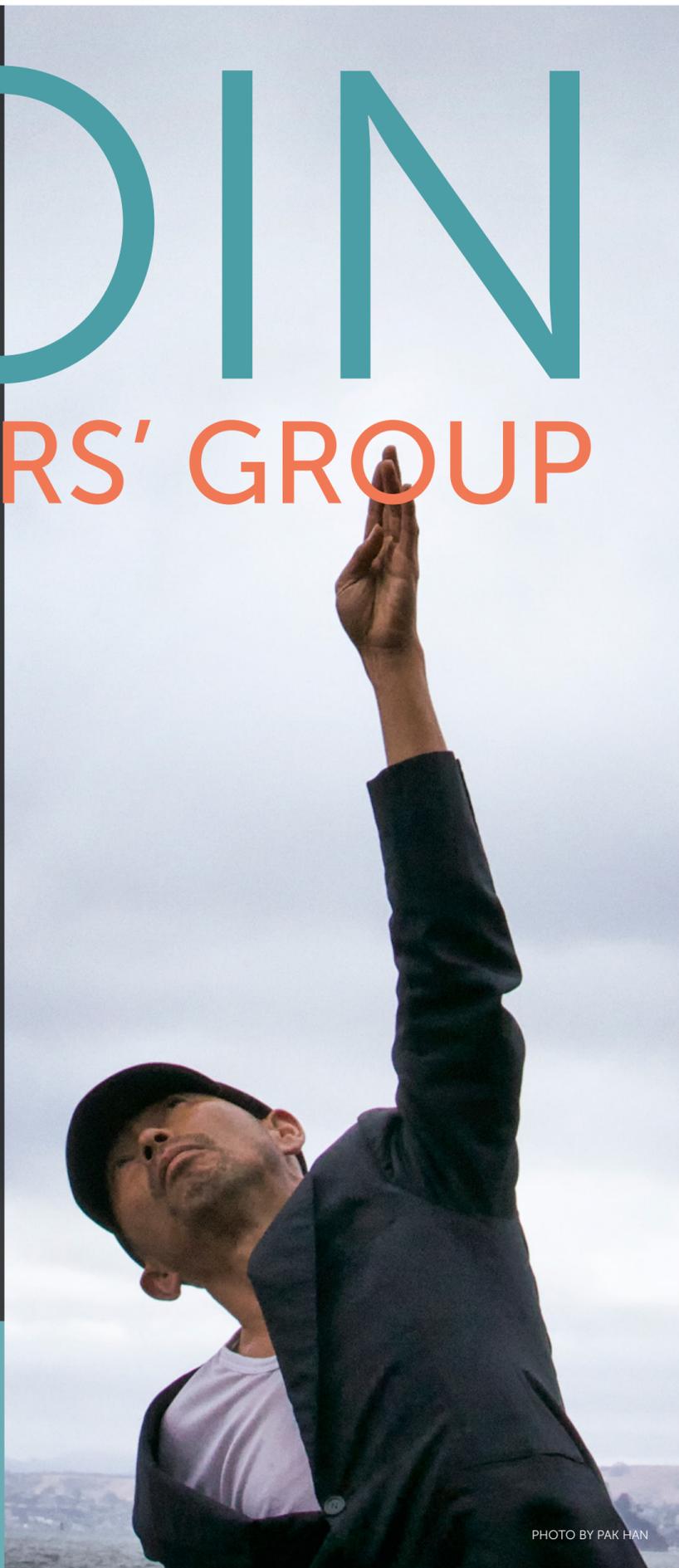


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THANK YOU

In Dance and Dancers' Group for continuing to support the beloved Bay Area dance community.

Get the latest YBG Festival news by signing up for the monthly eNewsletter on our website and following us on social media.

Wishing you well and hope to see you all very soon at Yerba Buena Gardens Festival!

Yerba Buena Gardens, Mission & Third/Fourth Sts., San Francisco
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ROUT OF PRACTICE

One of my jobs is college admissions essay coach. The most popular platform for college admissions is called the Common Application. Over 900 colleges and universities use the Common App as their gateway for admission. The Common App requires the usual stuff: personal data, standardized test scores, classes and grades, letters of recommendation, and a personal essay. Students are asked to answer one of seven prompts; they include questions about background, identity, interests, obstacles faced and overcome, beliefs challenged, problems solved, feats accomplished, the sort of things most 17-to-18-year-olds have never spent a moment reflecting on.

In 2020, the Common App added a special, optional COVID-19 essay question (250 words): “Community disruptions such as COVID-19 and natural disasters can have deep and long-lasting impacts. If you need it, this space is yours to describe those impacts. Colleges care about the effects on your health and well-being, safety, family circumstances, future plans, and education, including access to reliable technology and quiet study spaces.”

When I am advising students on how best to answer this prompt,

there’s no time to deconstruct the notion that “colleges,” like “states” and “corporations,” have feelings. Instead I get straight to the point: unless you or someone close to you has gotten sick, or you’ve lost someone, or a parent has lost a job or a home, or you lack the space and resources necessary for a successful remote learning experience, you don’t have to answer the question. No one wants to hear you whine about having had your internship at a startup, or Mathletes competition, or summer STEM camp canceled. Everything important to everyone has been canceled.

But some students really want to answer the question because they have been terrorized by the well-known fact that most if not all other optional supplemental essay questions posed by specific, usually “elite” colleges, are not actually optional. If you have nothing to say about how you single-handedly saved your local park, or made it into the Olympic trials for curling, or invented an app that cures diabetes, why are you applying to Harvard, chump? These students can’t let a prompt remain unanswered; it would be blasphemy.

In those cases, I tell my students to write about how they pivoted in the face of shelter-in-place. One student, a competitive gymnast, designed an online training program that didn’t require rings, parallel bars, and 40-square-foot sprung floor. Another went grocery shopping for the most at-risk members in their community. A third offered free online tutoring in Calculus. These are good stories, important stories,

sometimes inspiring stories about making lemonade out of lemons.

I am getting to the point, I promise.

I have been living through the pandemic so far mostly unscathed: roof over head, food in the fridge, self and family healthy and safe, jobs retained and even expanded, access to stable internet. For the slings and arrows of my particular experience, I have [my TinyLetter](#) to vent. So if I were one of my students, I’m not sure I’d answer the COVID-19 Common App prompt.

And yet, I’ve given myself a version of it for dance. How has dance been affected by COVID-19? How does one even talk about the year dance had? And what do I even mean by “dance”? Dance as concept? Dance as practice? Dance as community? If it were a multiple choice exam rather than an essay question, I’d choose all of the above.

Like an obituary for a famous person, I’m writing this before 2020 is dead. It’s early December. The rains have finally come to the Bay Area. My kids and I have been marveling at cloud formations and hunting rainbows. Biden won the election and there has been dancing in the streets. T**** has yet to concede. Republicans are claiming voter fraud where convenient for them to do so. Over 72 million people thought T**** was great or good enough or the best choice, revealing the tentacular reach of ignorance and hatred and fear and capitalism run amok. The pandemic is enjoying a resurgence, ravaging populations across the nation and the world, hitting BIPOC communities hardest. Nearly 300 thousand Americans dead; over 1.5 million globally. Still, people gallivant masklessly

and have in-person holiday parties. The concept of freedom has been reframed in the most ridiculous ways. Antiracism—the foundational ideology of our nation—rages on. No justice for Breonna.

In the midst of all this, how did dance fare?

Studio closures, staff layoffs, classes canceled, performances canceled. Dance communities retraumatized by another government failure to address a lethal virus. Dancers' Group has tried to keep the dance community abreast of [resources](#) to ensure personal and institutional survival but the bungled federal response to the virus has meant real, permanent loss on an unprecedented scale.

And yet, I've never felt more surrounded by dance. It seems like the practice of dancing has only grown during COVID. Dance classes and performances got online and outside in what felt like mere hours into lockdown. Dancers have doubled down on their commitment to movement, disseminating dance content on YouTube, Vimeo, TikTok, Zoom, Twitch, Twitter, Facebook—name a digital platform and you will find dance there, recorded or streamed

THE COLLECTIVE HAND-WRINGING OVER THE FUTURE OF DANCE HAS BEEN MAINLY ABOUT THOSE BRANDS OF DANCE THAT RELY ON PARTICULAR STRUCTURES AND SPACES LIKE THE STUDIO, THE THEATER, THE COMPANY.

live. And dancers have taken to the streets—in parades and protests, in playground classes and shoreline performances. And terrible dance movies continue to be made and consumed on all the streaming services. Dance is everywhere.

The pandemic has reminded me that dance's "problem" is neither its

ephemerality nor its liveness. It has reminded me that dance doesn't have a problem. In fact, dance writ large has never been under threat. Dance will survive.

Which is not to say individual dancers and dance organizations will. Just as it has exposed deep inequities across the social order, COVID has further amplified the precarity of any life in dance; even in the best of circumstances, we lose dancers to pregnancy, motherhood, impossibly high costs of living, injury, illness, and death. The Bay Area continues to reel and keen over the death of the legendary Kathleen Hermesdorf as Portland mourns the loss of Mary Oslund. And then there are the dancers we never got a chance to know because of deeply entrenched ableism: the fact that some of the studios many of us long to return to remain inaccessible to wheelchair users speaks to the continued threat of that particular virus.

The collective hand-wringing over the future of dance has been mainly about those brands of dance that rely on particular structures and spaces like the studio, the theater, the company. Dance that depends on gathering in groups indoors to train, rehearse,

and perform. Studio dance. Theater dance. Dance companies, theaters, and schools are in trouble. As dancers we know dance is essential. As believers in science we know that had we locked down for real in March we could have been dancing together today.

As a (semi-retired?) concert dancer, I miss some things and not others. I

miss dance class in large groups without masks. Though I love dancing outside, as a modern dancer I miss the barefoot part. It's hard to roll through your tootsies when they're ensconced in dance sneakers. And I miss the time when I felt okay missing shows because I could only be in one place at a time. Now I feel like if I miss something, I have no excuse. It's all right there online—no Bay Bridge traffic or BART delay to blame.

And is it my imagination, or has there been more dance coverage in [The New York Times](#) than ever before?

If we were lucky enough to have our health and our wits during this time, the pandemic has been and continues to be an opportunity to reflect on the past as we lay the groundwork for a better future, in dance and beyond. My hope for post-pandemic dance is that we continue to question everything so when we go back to stuff, we go back to the stuff we really need. For example: [The Bessies](#) decided to forego giving awards to individuals this year and are honoring (and giving cash to) all nominees instead. Heather Robles, managing director and producer of the Bessies said, "It did not seem appropriate to continue with business as usual."¹ If we learn nothing else from this year, it should be crystal clear that so much of the usual business was bad business. Let's continue to question the value of dance awards.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I kept a social distancing diary. I had planned to write something every day until the pandemic was over. I stopped at day 100 due to burnout. My first entry (March 14) reveals a mother unable to imagine being stuck at home with kids for a month. Post number two—first positive COVID case at UC Berkeley. Reading through the hundred posts, I see how much I had gained from early quarantine—the space to write freely, the impulse to cook creatively, the time to spend happily with family, the clarity to face my racism. And I see how quickly I have lost

those gains—I'm back to academia-induced imposter syndrome, boxed mac-n-cheese, wanting to smack my kids, and painful reckoning with the white supremacy lodged in my tissue. Though I continue to work toward an antiracist future through groups like ODC's Equity Working Group and my own self-study, all the new recipes and online [Gaga](#) classes and art projects just lost their shine over time. Now, looking back on the past nine months with promising vaccines on the horizon, I fear forgetting—the fires because the air is currently clear, the children in cages because they're no longer making front page news, the dozens of Black men and women murdered by the police because we've said their names.

At this very moment it is December 12, night three of Chanukah, the festival of lights. I don't like to pit light against darkness. There is beauty and richness in darkness. So, to call this past year a dark time and leave it at that feels irresponsible and inaccurate.

On this cold, dark evening, after lighting the menorah, I stood with [Chris Evans](#), Ernest Jolly, Yvette Aldama, and a few neighborhood passersby in front of the Idora Park Project Space Gallery on the corner of Shattuck and 56th Street in Oakland to take in *Gathering at a Distance: Ritual and Memory*. The exhibit, curated by Jolly, featured magnificent costumes from the New Orleans African American Carnival and Mardi Gras Masking Indian masking traditions by Cherice Harrison-Nelson and Fahamu Pecou, as well as a design by Dana Kawano. Three dynamic examples hung in the display windows, flanking a video collage of footage from House/Full of Black Women, Carnival events in Cuba and New Orleans, and the New Orleans-based Roots of Music youth marching band projected on the wall inside the space. Chris and I hadn't seen each other since just before lockdown so we talked and talked as the 15-minute

video looped over and over again, straining to hear each other through our masks and over the sound of Saturday evening traffic.

We talked about the themes of the exhibit: history, memory, ritual, and tradition. Chris told me about her training in the Talawa Technique with [Thomas Talawa Presto](#), founder and

All year we've been surrounded by darkness and light. Some of the light is too bright. Some things that seem to have come out of the shadows and into the light have always been standing there in plain sight. We need to keep shining a light on white supremacy but it doesn't deserve the warmth that light

I'M TERRIFIED OF FORGETTING SO I PRACTICE REMEMBERING, USUALLY IN WRITING, SOMETIMES IN DANCING. I REPEATEDLY WRITE DOWN WHAT I ALREADY KNOW BECAUSE I'M AFRAID TO FORGET HOW TO REMEMBER. AND I DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER ONLY TO FORGET.

artistic director of Tabanka African & Caribbean Peoples Dance Ensemble in Oslo, Norway. She talked about the technique as a decolonizing practice as she undulated her torso and marched softly in place.

Chris got me wondering about decolonizing as a practice of inviting our tissue to remember those ideas and experiences the colonizer wants us to forget. It seems to me that fundamental to white supremacy is a persistent pressure to forget. Perhaps the first step to purging white supremacy is remembering it's there in the first place, always in first place. The white supremacist concept of memory is linear, which means it leaves what it remembers behind—we remember to forget. Though the concept of muscle memory seems to have reached beyond the dance universe, the idea of memory in bone, fascia, and breath remains on the fringe.

I'm terrified of forgetting so I practice remembering, usually in writing, sometimes in dancing. I repeatedly write down what I already know because I'm afraid to forget how to remember. And I don't want to remember only to forget.

brings. Thankfully, warmth is not exclusive to light. Caves are cold and dark, but wombs are dark and warm. When my babies came out of the darkness into the light they made it clear they weren't happy and that they needed time to adjust. It seems we are all still adjusting.

I used to love the heat of the summer sun on my skin when I was a teenager but we had some ozone layer then. Winter, our so-called dark time, brings the best form of light—not too hot, not too bright, just right. The sun warms our faces as the wind chills our bones.

Dark and light, warm and cold. Our theaters have been dark. When they open into the light again, I hope we remember the dark and all it helped us see.

¹ Peter Libbey, "Bessies to Forgo Individual Awards This Year," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/19/arts/dance/bessies-to-forgo-individual-awards-this-year.html>

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I Wonder if My Neighbors Can Hear Me Singing

In March, when we received the Stay at Home Order, I was burnt out. Most days, I was driving in circles around the Bay to keep up with my freelance gigs, eating peanut butter sandwiches in my car between jobs, and desperately in need of a break. I couldn't have imagined when we received that first Stay at Home order on March 16 that we would be here now.

It's January 2021 as you read this, but I'm writing to you on an early December morning of clear blue skies and crisp air, having just looked at a map that describes 99% of the population of California in places of widespread transmission, the highest tier. We are on the precipice of another sweeping Stay at Home Order, with hospitals nearing capacity. For some of us, this does not affect us - we have not been leaving our houses for nonessential purposes so we will continue to not leave our homes for nonessential purposes. For some, this may mean loss: of work or otherwise. For others, this could mean something else entirely.

A few days into the Stay at Home Order, I started writing. I thought it might be interesting to have a written account of what being at home was like, but it turned into a time capsule of sorts with notes from almost everything I've done this year: classes and workshops online, zoom happy hours, meetings. The desire to write has come and gone in waves - some days the notes are detailed and copious, others there is only a line or two - but it does give me a picture of how

I've spent my time this year. I hope that you'll go on this journey with me and perhaps even take stock of what you've done this year, and feel proud that despite it all, we have kept going.

March

THE MONTH STARTED with live performances. I remember sitting in a theater. I remember hugging friends afterwards. I remember a friend sharing a piece where paper cascaded from a shredder that was suspended on a ledge above the stage space. And then we were told we had to stay at home. We were told there was a virus that was infecting people all over the globe. Infectious disease researchers told us this was their worst nightmare: a respiratory illness that spreads through vapor particles in the air.

I saw a mobilization in the dance community that I didn't expect. Almost overnight, I could suddenly get on my computer and take classes with Movement Research in New York, with Gaga teachers in Tel Aviv and New York, with legends in our field like Debbie Allen in Los Angeles. I saw our Bay Area dance community pivot swiftly to continue classes and training online. Our dance homes, Shawl-Anderson, ODC, LINES, and many more, created free and accessible at home pre-recorded and live content. My dance educator friends cleared entire rooms in their apartments to take and teach class. And to tell you the truth: I didn't do any of it.

The first days of the pandemic involved painting miniature watercolors on my couch and watching terrible sitcoms. Those days involved two hour walks around my neighborhood looking at chalk art and blooming flowers. They involved 7-minute yoga classes on an app that lifted their paywall because of the pandemic. But I didn't dance. I couldn't.

April

AS MARCH FLUTTERED AWAY INTO APRIL, we thought that we would be back to teaching in person after Spring Break. We thought that we would finish the

school year strong. We thought that our students would still get to participate in their graduation ceremonies. I hadn't lost any of my work yet. My undergraduate Modern and Jazz class shifted to be online. We took a different approach to moving. We moved in the space we had available to us, we created tiny dances, we listened to music, took walks, and observed the natural world around us. The young students I taught got to see videos of my dog walking through the frame while I made lots of silly shapes with my body and asked them to do the same. And while I was teaching online, I still didn't take class. Instead I took embodied singing classes. I participated in a series called "Empty and Full" which pretty accurately described what those early weeks in the pandemic felt like. I belted sounds and syllables and only half heartedly wondered if my neighbors could hear me singing. I wrote that I was starting to feel like I had space in my lungs again, like a tightness of worry was unwinding.

May

IN HINDSIGHT, I'D LIKE TO CALL MAY: I will begrudgingly and selectively take class online, if I have to. And I'll like it, dammit.

The unwinding led to a return of the desire to move. I took a virtual workshop and started rehearsing again for a performance that was moved to an online platform for June. It was bizarre to work on zoom. I found myself writing about the loss of my back space in an effort to lean toward the movement to see or understand it in ways that are just unknowable through my screen. I had virtual conversations with other movers about hierarchies and values, ambitions and curiosities, pedagogy and the pandemic. I facilitated a conversation about racial equity in dance. I was starting to feel momentum again.

June

THE MOST PREVALENT FEELING IN JUNE WAS THIS: flooded. After the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests for racial justice, nearly every presenter, institution, studio, and organization sent out an email notifying me that they were going to learn about equity and

PHOTO BY SHINICHI ITOYA-KOGA

I WASN'T SURE WHAT TO EXPECT AND THE NERVES LEADING UP TO PERFORMANCE WERE SO DIFFERENT FROM LIVE PERFORMANCE: instead of worrying about the performers and the costumes, I was worried about my internet connection holding up for the performance duration and pressing the right buttons to screen share.

included unaccountable, non-tangible language about how they're going to do better. When I reflect on this now I can't help but wonder: are all those entities still doing the constant, necessary work of anti-racism? Or have they moved on and allowed it to fade away like the news cycle? Have they figured out what the ongoing work looks like? To whom are they practicing accountability?

In between the flooding, I felt angry. I told anyone who would listen that in 2019 there were 19 days when the killing of a Black person by the police wasn't reported. Why weren't they sending me emails that Black lives matter then? Why weren't they launching granting programs for BIPOC artists then? What good is hiring BIPOC people if your toxic organizational environment remains? When will they understand that decolonization is not a metaphor?

I had hoped that these conversations would go deeper. I had hoped that there would be frank conversations about who is left out, who is being heard, and how to sustain this work. Perhaps there is a reason to still hope, but as I write this, months later, I'm still not sure.

July

COME JULY, I FELT GRATEFUL to participate in the creation of an event through Women of Color in the Arts for non-Black women of color to come together and assess how we can act in solidarity with our Black colleagues at the institutions where we work as artists, arts administrators, curators, presenters, and a variety of other roles. To be in the company of others who are thinking deeply about the necessary work filled my cup. It fed that momentum. I was also in the process of generating virtual experiments for a summer residency. I was sort of lost and swimming around in the murky waters of trying to understand my role as an artist during a pandemic. I had finally gotten back into the groove of moving, so to speak, but to create still felt out of place and untethered against the state of the world.

August

AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF AUGUST, I had a virtual performance over zoom, partially live and partially pre-recorded. So many feelings came up in the process of it all and I think it's led me to more questions about performance than answers. I was so grateful that friends from so many different times in my life were able to be there (though we live far apart). I was so grateful my family was there in the zoom room, too. I wasn't sure what to expect and the nerves leading up to performance were so different from live performance: instead of worrying about the performers and the costumes, I was worried about my internet connection holding up for the performance duration and pressing the right buttons to screen share. After the performances ended, I was in my house and it was quiet. I sat on the couch and ate dinner. I texted the performers in their respective homes. I knew that it would be different, but I also knew that somehow I wanted to recreate the feeling of being in a theater with people. On zoom, you can't watch the audience watch your work. You can't sit and have a one-on-one conversation with someone. You can't hug the performers and have a toast with them "backstage" before greeting friends and family. The feelings were different. Not bad, just different.

September & October

IN SEPTEMBER, I WAS TAKING A CLASS OVER ZOOM and the instructor of that class said to us "be with the rigor that you have today." Later in the month, in a different class, a different teacher said "perhaps the act of singing and moving can be an act of living in forgiveness?" I thought that if I tried to practice living in forgiveness I might forgive myself for all the things that I have worried about this year - that I'm not doing enough, that my work is going to become irrelevant, that I will be forgotten, that if I don't push myself to get that grant application in my career is doomed, that the decimation of our live performing arts landscape means I'll never

be able to make the work I want again, and on and on and on. While I was practicing living in forgiveness, in October a friend said to me, "I don't know how long it'll last, but in the last four months, I've felt more heard as a Black woman than I have ever before in my life." I hope that it lasts. I hope that she continues to be heard.

November

AS I REMEMBER NOVEMBER, this most recent month, what I feel most deeply is what I'll call an anxiety hangover which clouded the month. In March, I couldn't dance at all. In November, I took a class almost every day. Despite it all, I've adapted.

December

NOW IT IS DECEMBER AND I AM HERE. As we close out the year and I reflect on what this year brought and took away, I am a mess of conflicting impulses. I am grateful for the classes I can take all over the world (with just a little bit of time zone math). I am deeply frustrated and heartbroken to see so much unnecessary suffering and death caused by the immense failures of our political and public health systems. I am comfortable with the routine that my partner, my dog, and I have each morning: yoga, dog walk, breakfast, work. I am stifled because no amount of rearranging furniture will give me the room to be as expansive as I feel in a dance studio. Like many of you, I am filled with worry and relief almost equally, almost simultaneously. And, as the 2020 calendar year ends, I am here, waiting as patiently as I can to feel the weight of a dance partner, the hug of a long-separated friend, the touch of a dance teacher to guide me toward the movement.

BHUMI B PATEL is a queer, desi artist/activist. Her work involves dancing, choreographing, curating, educating, writing, and scholarship as a pursuit for liberation, with the time and space to decolonize the body. She seeks to create movement outside of white models of dance through use of improvisational practices and tapping into kinesthetic processing. Patel's work has been presented at SAFEhouse Arts, LEVYsalon, Shawl Salon, max10, Studio 200, Molissa Fenley and Friends, Summer Performance Festival, RAWdance's Concept Series, The San Francisco International Arts Festival, Berkeley Finnish Hall, PUSHfest, Shawl-Anderson's Queering Dance Festival, and Studio 210 Residency. Bhumi was a 2017-2018 Emerging Arts Professionals Fellow and a 2019 Women of Color in the Arts Fellow. She is a member of Dancing Around Race and Cat Call Choir. She's been published in the San Francisco Chronicle, Life as a Modern Dancer, Contact Quarterly, and In Dance. pateldanceworks.org



PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

DETOUR DANCE PRESENTS: THE NELKEN LINE

Nourishment looks like many different things. For me, it came in the form of a hilltop regaled with a gorgeously glittery gaggle of drag artists, queers, and trans & gender-nonconforming folks performing Pina Bausch's work at sunset—a salve on the dry lips and knuckles and hearts of my chosen family. This film, my reimagining of [The Nelken Line](#) wasn't just an opportunity to add my singular straw of hay to the stack of hundreds that exist in digital archives. It was a reckoning of borrowed movement on borrowed land, a time capsule for the moment we are living through, an act of joy.

—Eric Garcia, Co-Director [Detour Dance](#)

WHAT'S IN A

CONVERSATION?

by JOCHELLE PEREÑA



PHOTO COURTESY OF LUNA DANCE INSTITUTE. (OPPOSITE PAGE/CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): PHOTOS BY GHANI BOCKWINKEL, COURTESY OF LUNA DANCE INSTITUTE AND KRISTIN BURKE, COURTESY OF LUNA DANCE INSTITUTE

At Luna, we've been offering informal community conversations around dance teaching inquiry for over 10 years under various names and formats—Topic Tuesdays, Issues of Practice, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Practitioner Exchanges are the most recent iteration, and we chose the name to emphasize the back-and-forth nature of a conversation amongst peers. An Exchange is facilitated each month by a Summer Institute alum on a topic of their choice, ranging from Dance and Cultural Relevancy, to Dancers as Leaders, to Agency and Power in Early Childhood, and more. Like all participants, facilitators bring questions to the roundtable discussion to unpack together, sharing expertise and experience. Since March we've been offering 1–3 Exchanges each month via Zoom as a response to requests from our community; the topics, each addressing teaching dance from a distance, are scheduled as new questions emerge. Folks have tuned in from all over the States, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Japan. Some pop in just once, many attend regularly.

In promoting Exchanges, I've highlighted them as opportunities for alumni to step into leadership roles as facilitators and advocates, and for supportive community-building amongst dance educators. But since Practitioner Exchanges went virtual,

“We had an incredible Practitioner Exchange last night!” I tell my [Luna](#) colleagues, “I laughed, I even cried, we danced around, and the conversation just flowed.” I realize as I’m saying this, that I’m not fully describing the depth of the discussion, and that in fact, it sounds a bit trite. But my colleagues are curious, “Great! What did you learn?” I pause, mouth open, stumped. What did I learn? What am I actually learning from all these Exchanges? What’s in a conversation?

and I've been Zoom-hosting all of them, I've noticed that something more subtle, yet perhaps more profound is happening.

Classroom teacher and Exchange facilitator Kristen Burke said this: "Somehow there's a container here, I don't understand how this was created, but it feels like there's a container where ... you can just be in the mystery. And something comes out of it, even if I can't articulate it. So I just feel grateful that there's, there's just the draw to keep coming back and be present, even if I don't know why." This sounds pretty magical, and a little unbelievable, but it echoes my sentiments that something has shifted inside me after these conversations, a door has opened, there is movement and real change. It's not unlike how I feel after a group improvisation, and when I consider this, the magic of these Exchanges becomes easier to articulate.

PLAYFUL PROCESSING

As in a group improv, an Exchange emphasizes not the products that come out of it—the final dance or the list of best practices or big takeaways—but the process. And real processing of ideas and theories is happening. Unlike many professional development (PD) workshops, Exchanges don't deliver content. Inquiries are placed on the table like offerings from all the participants, without the anticipation of answering them. Instead, together we tease questions apart, intertwine, ponder and chew on them, try out different responses from multiple angles, and apply theories we've read about to our teaching practice—just like we would capture someone's movement in an improv, try it on in different ways, develop it, keep it or let it go. Dance teaching artist Sam Stone explained it this way: "It's really nice to be in a space that is non-performative where you're not trying to get in something wise to say,

There is potency in being witnessed in this development, in observing others observe you fumble around, try out an idea, figure something out.

JOHELLE PEREÑA



where you can fumble through things that you're going through and have other people ... to see their nodding heads or adding to it, just to fumble together."

The casualness of meeting by Zoom has helped in honoring process over product. Artist educators can tune in from their homes, cozied up with tea or backyard in the sun. They haven't battled through traffic or struggled to find parking, carrying an expectation of "this better be worth it". The effort to show up is reduced to a click of a link, and instead they, well, just show up and be present. The conversations can then become connective rather than transactional. With kids, pets, and dinner-making happening in the background, this kind of PD feels more integrated with real life, and more relatable because we see each other and ourselves as humans in our homes, rather than "professionals" in professional settings. The pressure of preciousness and perfectionism is off, and fumbling feels permissible, even encouraged.

Recently I read an interview with educators Hannah Beach and Tamara Neufeld Strijack in which they posited that, for children, entertainment is replacing play. "There is nothing wrong with entertainment, but it is not the same thing as play. Entertainment is like an in-breath and play is like an out-breath. Many children are breathing in and in and in. Play

is nature's way of providing children a place to digest and release their emotions ..." Adults need play, too, real play that is not goal oriented. For me, Exchanges can act as playgrounds where dance educators work through and digest all the messaging we absorb from the media, social media and our inboxes—heavy, critical messaging about our health, the environment, trauma, racism and anti-racism, and more. What do we do with all this messaging, this content that we've inhaled? Are we just holding it in? Breath and the ability to breathe becomes, once again, political. As dancers we know we cannot fully move when we hold our breath. Often it is the exhale that drives the next movement, the breath that grounds us in more authentic movement. Are we providing ourselves with spaces to breathe, to exhale? In an effort to remind us of the power of breath, and to tap into our embodied knowingness, each Exchange begins with a dance party that releases the exhale through laughter and high-charged joyful movement.

REFLECTING IN

Another quality of Exchanges that feels relevant is their reflective nature. Reflection is multi-dimensional. It's related to the aforementioned processing, and, like celebrating process over product and releasing perfectionism, it counteracts dominant

capitalistic cultural norms. We have been trained to look linearly through a lens of progress, so reflecting on past actions and thoughts is "a step backwards instead of a step forward," as Sam describes it. But "that feels really different ... that feels nourishing, that feels like get back in, as opposed to what to do, where to go, what to do, what will feed me." When we reflect, we spiral in, nonlinearly, and go deeper. In going deeper, we see a little more of ourselves reflected back to us, we see something we didn't see before. It might be a filter or a bias, a habit that no longer serves us, or a practice that feels insignificant but has a big impact. As dancers we embody reflection: when we improvise we often discover something new in our very familiar bodies, and find ourselves again because we're tuning in and listening deeply. In Practitioner Exchanges, reflection is often revealed with exclamations like, "Oh wow, I really needed to hear myself say that," or "I had no idea why I was feeling this way. Thank you for letting me talk that out." Classroom teacher Christine Atkins articulates, "I've been to so many [district] PDs that just hurt my heart, just hurt my heart because I was like 'Really? Can I just get [this info] out of my iMac?' And so to come to a PD that just, I feel like I'm being developed as an individual ... I am getting developed, this is actually real PD ... personal development."

COLLABORATIVE RECIPROCITY & COLLECTIVE CARETAKING

There is potency in being witnessed in this development, in observing others observe you fumble around, try out an idea, figure something out. Instead of being trapped in a personal echo chamber, our reflective processing becomes more real because others hear it, and our words alter the space, offering a new path into the conversation for someone else. When another practitioner responds, following that

path, we recognize that we have something to offer, we recognize our value. And we recognize the value of each participant in our listening, following, developing their ideas. I see evidence of this appreciation in the stream of Zoom hearts, shout-outs via Chat, smiles and hand gestures signifying applause and resonance. Music and dance teaching artist Mara Beckerman shares, "Each time I come I feel nervous as if anything I say will be seen as strange, weird and NOT dance teacher-ish. And then each time I come I get great ideas and discover that what I share is appreciated and even welcomed ... I leave feeling that I have a community of like-minded people to check in with. I don't feel so alone!" It's a collaborative reciprocity that is also creatively generative, building and spiraling and deepening into more than the sum of its parts. Christine elaborates: "It's kind of like a good potluck ... everybody brings something good. Like everybody brings something on the plate here, ... and it's good food, and we all get fed, you may not all eat the same thing or taste the same thing. There's such a richness in the dialogue and the acceptance ... of people diving in, and willingness to share that inevitably you're going to come away with some nugget or something that's just going to make the day better, the next couple of weeks teaching better. You know, just some good juju-flip to the spirit of self-care in many ways as an educator, as a dance teacher and as a person."

The collective caretaking of the Exchange conversation parallels how we cooperatively take care of the dance of a group improv. We consider when to enter and exit, when to pause, repeat, expand and enhance, when to solo, when to support. "There's such an absence of ego here that it's kind of inspiring," says Christine, "there's just no ego in the room, and just straight, just compassion and love and joy and that's

pretty amazing to be part of that." We hold space for each other, listening deeply, and out of that holding grows a trust which invites participants in. This trust is enhanced by the fact that all participants are dance educators. We don't need to justify or explain the value of our artform as we do in so many other circles; we get each other, and feel like we belong, feel like we're part of something bigger. "I love that I have complete and utter trust in the process," teaching artist Maura Whelehan explains, "No one needs to arrive in any certain way, just showing up guarantees ... That trust ... can really calm me down from ... all the frenetic places ... Just showing up can be vulnerable." Vulnerable + courageous to arrive fully, to share, play, process, reflect, exchange and change.

What am I learning from these Exchanges? I'm learning that these are creative spaces—we're using the same creative muscles we use while dancing to connect, reflect, relate, collaborate, play, and be curious, and the same muscles we need to imagine alternate possibilities and realities different from what we're currently experiencing.

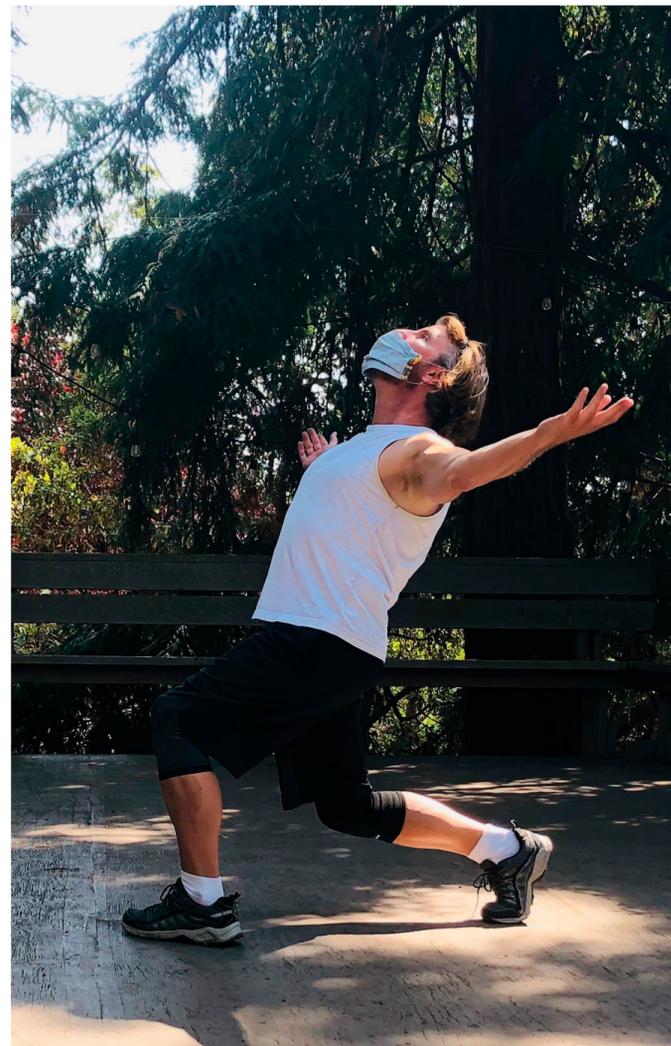
I feel changed after an Exchange: a little looser, a little stretched, a little lighter. It's a micro-change, nothing flashy, but deep and opening, as if a blockage has shifted and new ideas can flow more freely. I'm learning that we desperately need spaces like this right now, when so much feels obstructed, limited, overwhelming and out of our control, to exhale and release so that we can look at the challenges in another way, or find ourselves again.

JOHELLE PEREÑA is choreographer, dance teaching artist and Professional Learning Manager at [Luna Dance Institute](#). Her work investigates the in-between liminal spaces, the discovery of the unfamiliar within the familiar, and cultivating freedom and power through dance. She is a student in play and imagining new realities, led in daily discoveries by her two children. She hosts Practitioner Exchanges monthly, and welcomes you to join. [Find out more here.](#)

PHOTO BY PAUL ZIMMER

CATCHING UP

with Dana Lawton Dances and *The Farallonites*



(Opposite) Vera Schwegler and Kara Townsend, (left) Olutola Afalayan, Colin McDowell, Robin Nasatir, Kara Townsend and Vera Schwegler; (right) Michael Armstrong

by HEATHER DESAULNIERS

One Saturday afternoon last February, I sat upstairs in Shawl-Anderson Dance Center's large studio space watching Dana Lawton Dances (DLD) prepare their upcoming new work, *The Farallonites*. Created by Artistic Director Dana Lawton, scored by Thomas Edler and inspired by a set of poems by Jennifer Kulbeck, *The Farallonites* was slated to premiere April 24, 2020 at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater. When I was invited to observe this particular rehearsal, the mixed discipline collaboration was well on its way. A blend of text, music, light and movement, the evening-length piece told the story of the dedicated lighthouse keepers who lived on the Farallon Islands in the 1800s - an uninhabitable

archipelago twenty-seven miles off the coast of San Francisco. What follows are some initial observations I had about the work's various chapters:

A duet called 'birds' finds one dancer balancing on the back of another, like a raven or eagle suspending itself on a cliff before soaring into the air. A variation for the company's women is grounded in a collective triplet step, countered by upper bodies performing individualized task-based gestures. It has such a beautiful duality to it - the common footwork pattern suggesting a keen sense of sisterhood while the rest of the body reading of loneliness and isolation. Yet another ensemble sequence takes the form of a square dance. While uproarious in quality, it also has a tenuous

PHOTOS BY DANA LAWTON



Pictured: Olutola Afalayan, Michael Armstrong, Leah Curren, Tom Edler, Garth Grimball, Jennifer Kulbeck, Dana Lawton, Colin McDowell, Robin Nasatir, Vera Schwegler, Jennifer Smith, Kara Townsend

Our actions right now — mask-wearing, staying home, socially distancing — are similarly about caring.

overtone. Would the rigors and responsibility of their chosen life allow such revelry? Probably not. So, is this a dream? A memory? A longing? Each attendee will have to decide for themselves.¹

One can see direct parallels with our current situation. Threads of seclusion. Quarantine. Protection. Remoteness. And underlying it all is a profound theme: individual sacrifice for the greater good. Nine months ago, Lawton explained it like this:

“In the mid-1800s, the beacon was constructed on the Farallons to protect ships from crashing into the Islands, and so a few families moved there to run the lighthouse. The conditions were so treacherous and inhospitable – supplies would only arrive every six to nine months; when outside, their children had to be tied to boulders for protection against the water, wind and fog – and yet they were willing to navigate such a reality to provide light, saving people they would never meet.”²

PHOTO BY DANNY SCHER

Our actions right now – mask-wearing, staying home, socially distancing – are similarly about caring. Yes, caring for ourselves and those in our homes, but equally about caring for others. And it’s hard. We don’t know how long the self-isolating will last. We want to get back to our lives. To hug our friends. To venture outside without fear of who or what we may come into contact with. To travel. To see co-workers and colleagues in three dimensions, instead of on a screen.

Little did I know, but that February day would be one of the last times I would be in a dance studio in 2020. Just a few weeks later, in mid-March, shelter-in-place would be invoked to help curb the spread of COVID-19. So many programs and events would be cancelled,

The Farallonites being one of them. Ergo, the feature I was writing about it then would also not make it to an audience. Today, the coronavirus continues to rage on. *The Farallonites*, along with so many other projects, still awaits its debut.

‘Awaits’ is a key term. *The Farallonites* is still very much alive, though its journey has indeed been different than originally planned. Just before Thanksgiving, I caught up with Lawton (by phone) to learn more about the work’s trajectory and how she and the DLD family have been weathering a very bizarre 2020. “When it was clear that the April show was a no-go, we had a conversation about what we wanted to do,” she relays, “the dancers were incredibly committed to continuing the rehearsal process,

so starting in July, we began rehearsing outdoors, masked and socially distanced – it was really affirming and actually felt very normal, even though we were in masks and not touching one another.” They knew some sections, like solos, were doable within safety protocols, while others would need to be re-worked in light of these new conditions. At first, the notion of changing things, especially parts that had been set for some time, seemed a bit daunting, but the creative journey proved both revelatory and powerful. New artistic lenses and a deeper narrative layer began to emerge amidst the constraints. “*The Farallonites* is all about isolation; no one was together – needing to rehearse in the way we had to – drove this point home; we were able to discover new insights within the choreography,” describes Lawton. In the open air, they could feel the breeze and wind informing arm movements and torso undulations. They were able to take rehearsals to the beach and had the chance to see how the material

for a full house.” With traditional indoor venues off the table for the time being, *The Farallonites’* fate was unclear. Suddenly, a new opportunity arose. In a Kensington backyard, amidst statuesque redwoods, a stunning, private outdoor amphitheater stood. A stage surface, lights, seating – the whole nine yards! And it belongs to Danny Scher, who is a former colleague of DLD company member Robin Nasatir. Scher graciously offered up the space, and on October 3, DLD was able to share excerpts of *The Farallonites* with a small live audience, while adhering to the strictest of safety protocols. “Seeing the work in a natural setting was really quite something, as was the fact that people showed up,” Lawton remembers, “it was a moment to recognize the power of community, and the intense appetite for art, while being as safe as we could possibly be.”

DLD is not currently in rehearsal, though the company plans to re-group in March. The hope is by then

At first, the notion of changing things, especially parts that had been set for some time, seemed a bit daunting, but the creative journey proved both revelatory and powerful.

changed when performed in actual water. And the duality of being together and being apart at the same time took on new meaning.

A subsequent conversation with a friend led Lawton to also consider newness along another track in the rehearsal process. She suggested that Lawton’s son Henry, an avid skateboarding vlogger, might film and create vlogs of DLD as they continued building *The Farallonites*. Not dance film, but more a chronicle of process. While DLD has worked with video and projection in performance, this type of documentarian approach was something new for them. And they were all eager to see what might be captured. The resulting footage (available on [Dana Lawton Dances’ Facebook page](#)) is full of rich commentary and striking visuals - from choreographic phrases to conversations with the dancers to moments of discovery, experimentation and real-time trial and error. The genuineness and authenticity in every frame is undeniable, and as I watched each film, the impulse to move with the dancers was so strong.

At that point in the year (summer), a November premiere of *The Farallonites* at the Cowell was still a possibility. No one knew what fall might bring. But as September arrived, it became obvious that the work was not going to see a theater in 2020. For Lawton and DLD, that decision was both about safety and monetary realities: “a lower capacity, distanced audience, assuming that was even possible, just doesn’t work for our budget – we need to strive

that *The Farallonites’* next step might be clearer. “With its atmosphere and immersive location on the water in Fort Mason, I still have dreams of the piece on the Cowell stage, but who knows when and if that will happen, and where all the company dancers might be at that time,” shares Lawton. It could be months; it will probably be years. Though when that moment does come, Lawton knows it’s going to be epic, for *The Farallonites*, for the larger artistic community, and for humanity, “I don’t really know what will be the same and what will be different when this is all over, but I think we can anticipate that the desire for virtual life will greatly diminish and it will be replaced by a tremendous renaissance in and hunger for live experiences.”

¹ Excerpt is taken from an article I wrote for *In Dance* titled **Lights That Guide: Dana Lawton Dances presents *The Farallonites*** – it was intended to be printed as part of *In Dance’s* April 2020 edition, but due to COVID, *The Farallonites* performance was postponed.² Ibid.

HEATHER DESAULNIERS is a freelance dance writer based in Oakland. She is the Editorial Associate and SF/Bay Area columnist for *CriticalDance*, the dance curator for *SF Arts Monthly*, a contributor to *DanceTabs* as well as several other dance-focused publications.

KEEP UP WITH *THE FARALLONITES* and its journey at danalawtondances.org



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PRESERVING, BUILDING AND CONNECTING

ADDRESSING SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES THROUGH CULTURALLY SPECIFIC DANCE

by ANNE HUANG AND KERRY LEE

Culturally specific dance is a lifeline for diverse cultural communities throughout the United States to stay connected to our cultural roots. This article explores the role of culturally specific dancers to address important social justice issues of our time and the capacity building support needed to maximize their impact on the communities they serve as well as the dance sector at-large.

Kerry Lee, an American born Chinese, co-directs the [Atlanta Chinese Dance Company](#) with her immigrant mother. She has witnessed firsthand the power of culturally specific dance to transform lives – not only within her own community but also the broader American public with which they share their art. Atlanta Chinese Dance Company’s 2019 production *Ribbon Dance of Empowerment: Chinese Dance through the Eyes of an American* intertwined Chinese dance with personal storytelling by and about some of the nearly 100 dancers in the cast, celebrating the role the art form has played in their search for identity, belonging, and self-acceptance as Chinese Americans in the black/white racial binary of the South.

FOR COMMUNITIES FACING THREATS TO THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE, PRACTICING THESE ART FORMS HAS EMPOWERED THEM TO RECLAIM TRADITIONS, EMBRACE CULTURAL IDENTITIES, AND CONNECT TO THEIR ROOTS.

Anne Huang is the Executive Director of World Arts West, a regional presenting and arts service organization that supports over 450 Northern California dance companies sustaining the world's diverse dance and music traditions. After immigrating with her family to the US at age 12 to escape political persecution in Taiwan and spending her formative years trying to disappear into the white world, Anne turned to studying different cultural dance traditions and working with cultural artists on social justice issues as a way to embrace her own cultural roots and heal the broken pieces of herself. She has worked extensively with cultural artists and culturally specific arts organizations on capacity building and resource equity advocacy. Her latest project was [Live Arts in Resistance: Ancestral Knowledge, Art & Resistance](#), an interview series amplifying cultural artists' social justice journeys, co-presented by World Arts West, NAKA Dance Theater and EastSide Arts Alliance.

The following summarizes the common themes that arose in the LAIR interview series featuring CK Ladzekpo, Charya Burt, Alleluia Panis, Kiaz Malonga, and Victor Torres, conducted by Anne. Anne and Kerry also offer their reflections on these interviews. Collectively, their stories illustrate seven key roles that culturally specific dance has played in addressing social justice issues.

RECLAIMING CULTURAL TRADITIONS

There are multiple factors that have threatened the preservation of cultural traditions, artistic forms, language, and stories. Among them are genocide, colonialism, civil strife, transmigration, etc. Culturally specific dance has served as a powerful tool to keep culture alive.

[Charya Burt](#), an acclaimed master dancer, choreographer, vocalist, and teacher of classical Cambodian dance, grew up in Cambodia during the 1970s when over 90% of artists and educators were killed during the Khmer Rouge genocide. Her uncle Chheng Phon (Minister of Culture in the 1980s) once said that culture is the spirit of the nation, and she has dedicated her entire life to reviving the Cambodian culture that the Khmer Rouge attempted to destroy. While studying at the School of Fine

Arts in Phnom Penh (known today as Royal University of Fine Arts), Charya realized how important it was to be part of this culture rebirth and feels a sense of obligation to instill this spirit in young Cambodian Americans. Much of her work has been teaching youth in Cambodian communities in California and beyond, who were born into a deeply traumatized intergenerational community. The cultural elements of dance and music help them to know where they come from, and where they are going. Anne reflects that if you think of culture as a tree, the roots are the past, the trunk is the present, and the leaves are the future. If you remove the root, the entire tree dies. By nurturing the trunk, more leaves can grow. Charya's deep cultural work is like watering the tree, laying the groundwork for an abundance of leaves to blossom.

Dr. CK Ladzekpo, an African music and dance pioneer in the US and beyond, grew up in colonial Ghana in the 1940s and 50s where he was punished regularly in school for participating in drumming and dancing. Growing up in a culture centered around drumming and dancing, punishing him for it was tantamount to sending the message that he was not allowed to participate in his own cultural activities and rituals – that colonial forces were going to designate who he could and could not be. The British colonial regime sent the message that Christianity was good and his own culture was bad, with the goal of wiping out African cultural identity. Dr. Ladzekpo's deep love for these traditional forms propelled him to continue practicing them despite the punishment. He would go on to become the first professional artist from Africa to immigrate and settle in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he was instrumental in starting the African music program at UC Berkeley as well as the first African Cultural Festival in the Bay Area. He has also served as mentor of countless African diasporic artists. Anne reflects that by reclaiming his cultural traditions, Dr. Ladzekpo has reclaimed his people's right to exist – a right that was denied to them by their colonizers.



EMBRACING OTUR CULTURAL IDENTITY AMIDST PRESSURES TO ASSIMILATE

For many immigrants and children of immigrants, there is a constant tug-of-war between the traditions of our ancestral lands and the pressures to assimilate into the dominant culture of our current place of residence. Culturally specific dance has been a portal to embrace our cultural roots and forge a sense of identity, combating a sense of shame that is often felt for being different from and/or unwelcome in the dominant culture.

Dr. Victor Torres, a Full Professor in the Department of Chicano and Latin American Studies at California State University, Fresno and director of the university's Los Danzantes de Aztlán Mexican dance program, characterizes the *Zapateado* (Mexican folkloric footwork) as his weapon of resistance and folklorico as a means to resist assimilation. After the Mexican-American War ended in 1948, Mexicans found themselves as strangers in their own land – no longer Mexicans in Mexico, but rather Mexicans living in the US. Subjected to intense discrimination thereafter, they experienced a sense of inferiority as being called “Mexican” had a pejorative meaning. Parents changed Mexican names from Juan to John, Jose to Joe, etc. and chose not to teach their children to speak

Spanish, because they did not want them to experience discrimination. A key goal of the Chicano movement in the 1960s was to counter this narrative by reclaiming their Mexican heritage and promoting positive self-identity. This was where folklorico came in – as a public symbol of resistance to assimilation and a tool to recuperate and promote Mexican culture. For Dr. Torres, folklorico was the armor that would allow him to resist assimilation. For his children who grew up in white neighborhoods and were accused by Mexican immigrants of being too white, folklorico was their shield to defend their cultural authenticity.

Dr. Torres's story resonated with Kerry, who grew up in suburban Atlanta in the 1980s and 90s looking down on Chinese dance as inferior to western art forms such as ballet and questioning why her immigrant parents forced her to learn Mandarin Chinese. In her mind Chinatown had the connotation of being dirty and low class, and the standard of beauty was having blonde hair and blue eyes. It was the act of performing Chinese dance hundreds of times for cheering audiences from all walks of life that slowly chipped away her sense of inferiority, empowering her to embrace her Chinese heritage as something that could be admired and appreciated by all types of people. Kerry and her mother Hwee-Eng Y. Lee co-direct the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company to instill

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANNE HUANG AND KERRY LEE



Kerry Lee

PRACTICING CULTURALLY SPECIFIC DANCE IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT HAS BEEN SHARED ACROSS MULTIPLE GENERATIONS WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITIES.

Many of Kerry's students were adopted from China by white families. Chinese dance serves as one of few (if not the only) connection to their Chinese heritage, as most do not speak the language and are not exposed to Chinese culture at home. One dancer said, "At my school I have seen no more than ten Asians. Because of Chinese dance I can listen and try to comprehend fluent Chinese, I can see the Asian shops, I can taste the Asian cuisine, and I can smell the Asian spices. All of which I don't interact with on a daily basis." Another spoke of her embarrassment whenever a Chinese auntie would say something to her in Chinese that she could not understand, and that per-

Growing up, many of the activities that Kiazi did with his father involved Congolese drumming – drumming for classes and performances for Fua Dia Congo as well as rituals at home. Through these rituals, his father passed down family stories, spiritual traditions, political advocacy, and more. Kiazi became the lead drummer of Fua Dia Congo at 16 and began teaching at that age as well. He has taught and performed in the US, Canada, Costa Rica, Europe and Africa. Anne reflects that the Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts has become one of the most important buildings to study African dance and music in the US. Dancing and drumming, which are central to Congolese community gatherings, are like the glue that binds intergenerational communities together.

Kerry's mother Hwee-Eng Y. Lee, an immigrant from Singapore, started teaching Chinese dance just after Kerry was born in Atlanta and founded the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company in 1991. Kerry grew up dancing under her direction and returned home after dancing professionally in New York to co-lead the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company together. When Kerry asked her mother why she wanted to teach Chinese dance in Atlanta, she said she knew there would be a generation gap between them and she did not want them to have a cultural gap too. By instilling a love of Chinese dance and culture in her daughter, it would bring them closer together. There have been many pairs of mothers and daughters within the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company – and even mother and son, and grandmother and granddaughter too. The concept of family extends beyond bloodlines, creating a sense of belonging for the dancers who are often surrounded by people who do not look like them in their everyday lives. A four-year-old Chinese adoptee remarked, "We all have black hair!" on the first day of class, and she would go on to dance with the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company until she graduated from high school. Some of her classmates would continue beyond college into adulthood, forging friendships that have lasted a lifetime. The mother of another Chinese adoptee mentioned that her daughter had been having trouble socially at school but found a sense of belonging through Chinese dance – so much so that it was worth the five-hour round trip weekly commute between her home in Greenville, SC and the dance company in Atlanta!

forming Chinese dance was the only time when she felt fully in touch with her Chinese identity.

BUILDING INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Practicing culturally specific dance is a way of life that has been shared across multiple generations within households and communities. It holds space for people of different generations to engage in cultural traditions together, cultivating a sense of belonging that transcends bloodlines.

One example of intergenerational community building is second-generation Congolese American Kiazi Malonga and his late father Malonga Casquelourd, who was a renowned traditional artist from the Congo. Casquelourd traveled to the US in 1972 and shortly after, began to build his empire in traditional arts in the US and founded Fua Dia Congo. It was in this setting that Kiazi was trained and learned about his Congolese cultural heritage.

cultural awareness and pride in the next generation of Chinese Americans. Kerry recently reflected that she hopes her young dancers performing the Chinese ribbon dance feel as if they have the power to command a majestic dragon, and that they are not shy but proud to introduce it to their friends.

CONNECTING TO OUR CULTURAL ROOTS

Many immigrant communities have few opportunities to learn about their cultural heritage in the US. Culturally specific dancers have bridged that gap, providing access to cultural traditions, artistic forms, language, and stories that are otherwise out of reach.

Alleluia Panis, the Artistic and Executive Director of Kularts (the nation's premiere presenter of contemporary and tribal Pilipino arts), has organized tribal tours for Pilipino Americans to visit indigenous communities in the Philippines. The Philippines has been colonized

for many generations, so what many people think of as Pilipino dance forms actually have a colonized flavor. There are over 100 indigenous tribes in the Philippines, most of which are unknown or have been looked down upon by Pilipinos and Pilipino Americans. After working to decolonize her own mind, Alleluia has worked to help other Pilipino and Pilipino Americans decolonize their minds by creating opportunities to experience indigenous cultures outside of the big cities. In addition to organizing tribal tours, she has also brought indigenous master artists to the United States for cultural exchange and friendship.

"De-colonization work begins with de-colonizing my own mind. How do I see my own power? How do I step into my own power and beauty? How do I embrace my leadership? How do I increase the number of leaders, and help them empower more people to embrace their own leadership?"

—ALLELUIA PANIS

PHOTO BY BUBBA CARB

DANCE AS DIPLOMACY: BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND COMBATING RACIAL STEREOTYPES

In a country that is increasingly polarized, culturally specific dance is a cultural diplomacy tool that can bring disparate communities together to love and understand one another.

World Arts West's signature event, the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, celebrates and fosters appreciation for diverse cultural communities through an annual performance season of dance styles that have included traditional classical dance, sacred dance genres, vernacular dance forms, social dance, and folk dance presentations. Since 1978, the Festival's performances have presented over 450 companies and soloists to tens of thousands of audience members. The Festival has taken significant leadership in broadening the public awareness of world dance and music forms and in encouraging many artists to maintain their distinct traditions. The Festival artist jam featuring all participants at the end of the performance is an exemplary example of how artists of different cultures can come together as one – moving through space together, yet uniquely – to celebrate our shared humanity through dance.

Another example of dance as diplomacy is the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company's outreach performances in schools/universities, libraries, museums, senior centers, military bases, corporate events, international days, arts festivals, private parties and more throughout metro Atlanta and surrounding areas. China is not part of the

IN A COUNTRY THAT IS INCREASINGLY POLARIZED, CULTURALLY SPECIFIC DANCE IS A CULTURAL DIPLOMACY TOOL THAT CAN BRING DISPARATE COMMUNITIES TOGETHER TO LOVE AND UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER.

elementary school curriculum in Georgia, and oftentimes the company performs for audiences that are overwhelmingly non-Asian. Watching the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company may be one of few times they ever have a meaningful interaction with the Chinese American community – not to mention the first and only time they may ever see Chinese dance. In the black/white racial binary of the South, performing Chinese dance serves as a reminder that the Chinese American community exists and helps to debunk racist stereotypes. On more than one occasion, Kerry has encountered racial microaggressions just before performing. When a white school teacher asked where she was from and she said Atlanta, the teacher confusedly

turned to the person beside her to ask, "But where are her parents from?" as if Kerry had misunderstood her question. At a senior home, an older white man called them "slanty eyes." Kerry feels a sense of purpose even when performing for the smallest of audiences in the smallest of venues, as she views these opportunities as vehicles to spread positive energy and cultural awareness to people who she would otherwise never have the opportunity to meet. As the emotions expressed through the dances – joy, love, sorrow, etc. – are universally relatable, culturally specific dance provides a window into the soul and an opportunity to connect heart-to-heart. She finds that audiences who appear skeptical at the outset are often all smiles by the end, coming up to the performers afterwards to express their appreciation.

SHARING RARELY TOLD STORIES ABOUT "HYPHENATED" AMERICANS

Culturally specific dance is a platform to share rarely told stories about "hyphenated" Americans, such as the taboo subject of incarcerated Pilipino Americans and Chinese Americans in the South grappling with identity, belonging, and self-acceptance.

Starting in 2009, Alleluia Panis started an initiative to create works about subjects that are considered taboo in her community. She said that one of the most shameful things for a family was to have someone incarcerated, which she addresses in her piece *Incarcerated 6x9*. There is a large population of young Pinoys and Asian Americans who have been incarcerated. The piece was based on one person, and she mentioned that it was so tough to take on this subject that she had to find ways to remove it from their realities. She asked him what kept him sane, and he said it was his family – a family that was deeply rooted in the culture. The tragic story is not only about the incarcerated people, but the families who are impacted by it. This is a topic that

very few people know about, and Alleluia has brought visibility to it through her work.

In 2019 Kerry and the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company presented an original production *Ribbon Dance of Empowerment: Chinese Dance through the Eyes of an American*, inspired by an article Kerry had written about Chinese dance and creative placemaking for Alternate ROOTS' *Creating Place* multimedia collection. Not only did she share her own story growing up American born Chinese in the South – she also collected stories from her fellow dancers and families, including Chinese adoptees, immigrants, and biracial dancers. The production prompted an outpouring of even more

stories by audience members, as many approached Kerry in the lobby after the performance to share their personal reflections and sent heartfelt emails in the following days. An audience member who was adopted from Columbia thanked the company for giving voice to an aspect of the adoptee experience that is rarely discussed. Another mentioned that hearing Kerry speak of wishing she had blonde hair and blue eyes as a child deeply resonated with her and gave her a sense of healing. As an immigrant from Argentina who could not speak English, she had felt small and inferior just as Kerry had depicted in the mini dance drama. A white male said that he could not relate as he had never felt inferior, but that the performance made him think. Many of the dancers expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share their stories with over 1,000 audiences – including with friends and families whom they had never found a way to express these sentiments. The stories surprised some parents of other dancers who thanked the company for helping them to understand what their children may be going through.

BRIDGE TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Culturally specific dance is not just an artistic tool – it also serves as a bridge to higher education for young people facing economic and educational barriers.

Through his work with Los Danzantes, Dr. Torres has empowered Chicano/Mexican youth to pursue higher education by creating programs targeting high school folkloristas (practitioners of Mexican dance) that enhance their professionalism in folklorico and achieve academic excellence. Fresno State's Los Danzantes de Aztlán is located in the Central Valley, which is home to half the cities ranked as the poorest in the state of California and consists primarily of Hispanic students – many of whom attend rural schools, speak Spanish in the home, and are first generation college students. Dr. Torres's high school programs act as a feeder for the Los Danzantes dance program, inspiring young Chicanos to simultaneously pursue their passion for folklorico while earning a college degree. Dr. Torres runs the largest Chicano/Mexican commencement ceremony in the United States, with over 14,000 attendees in 2019. It was watching Danzantes performing at the commencement ceremony many years prior that convinced Dr. Torres to take over the dance program from Professor Ernesto Martinez, who had been trying unsuccessfully to recruit him. He was blown away by the caliber of the commencement as well as Danzantes' performance, which made him feel at home. Danzantes still performs at the commencement ceremony every year – a testament to the power of folklorico in transforming the lives and education of these youth.

CONCLUSION

Culturally specific dance has been a powerful tool to transform lives for many generations. For communities facing threats to their cultural heritage, practicing these art forms has empowered them to reclaim traditions, embrace cultural identities, and connect to their roots. Performances and classes have brought people together to understand and celebrate one another – not only across generations within a specific cultural community but also across communities of different cultures. New choreographic works have amplified rarely told stories about "hyphenated" Americans. Partnerships with educational institutions have built bridges to higher education for students facing economic and educational barriers.

Despite the deep social justice impact of cultural artists in diverse communities and the dance sector at-large, they have not received adequate support – both by audiences and philanthropic institutions. It takes an entire village to support cultural artists – culturally competent arts executives, fundraising professionals, arts administrators, archivists, production professionals, and more. The first step in cultivating that village is to garner the financial resources needed to identify and train these individuals. Anne has addressed this issue in a previous *In Dance* article *Resource Equity: Connecting Culturally Specific Dance Communities with Grants Funding*. Learn more [here](#). Building the entire ecosystem of culturally specific dance communities is the key to help cultural artists sustain and expand their impact for future generations.

DR. ANNE HUANG is the Executive Director of [World Arts West](#). Anne has worked extensively with cultural artists and arts organizations such as Charya Burt, Kyoungil Ong, Naomi Diouf, Alleluia Panis, Chinese Culture Center, Dimension Dance Theater, CubaCaribe, LIKHA, Bisemi, Halau 'o Keikiali'i, Cunamacue, and many others. Anne has served in leadership roles for National Dance Project's Regional Dance Development Initiative, New York Foundation for the Arts' Immigrant Artist Program, and the City of Oakland's Mayoral Arts Task Force. She is the Board Chair-Elect for the Dance/USA Board of Trustees.

KERRY LEE is the Co-Artistic Director of the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company. After graduating from Stanford University with a degree in engineering and working for a top ranked economic consulting firm, she followed her heart into the professional dance world in New York City. Kerry performed throughout the US and the British Virgin Islands with the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, H.T. Chen & Dancers, Dance China NY, and gloATL before returning home to co-lead the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company with her mother Hwee-Eng Y. Lee. For many years, she worked at the intersection of the arts and activism at Alternate ROOTS. She is also an avid writer, pouring her heart out in a blog entitled *Memoirs of a Chinese Dancer*.

kerryylee.com

C **IN** COMMUNITY



THEATRE FLAMENCO OF SAN FRANCISCO

Founded in 1966, [Theatre Flamenco of San Francisco](#) is one of the longest continually running flamenco performance groups outside of Spain. Currently offering classes for all levels.

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE FU



SANDRA SCHEUBER

“Elegy” originally premiered in 2002; danced here by NewGround Theatre Dance Company; videography by John Parenica. [Learn more](#)



LUCIA AUGUST / EVERYBODY CAN DANCE

Since 2010, Lucia August has been performing her own choreography through her platform, [Lucia August/Everybody Can Dance](#), expanding audience ideas of who can embody dance, regardless of age or size!

PHOTO BY LYNNIE FRIED

SALIMPOUR SCHOOL

[The Suhaila Salimpour School of Belly Dance](#) provides belly dance education and certification. Register now for the Spring 2021 semester at their online institute! Courses begin Jan 24.

DIMENSIONS DANCE THEATRE

Since the 1980s, [DDT](#) has become widely recognized for its presentation of both traditional dances and contemporary choreography drawn from African, Jazz, and Modern dance idioms. Their Youth program, Rites of Passage (ROP) is a comprehensive educational outreach program serving ages 8-18 throughout the East Bay.

DAVID HERRERA PERFORMANCE COMPANY

[David Herrera Performance Company](#) is a modern dance company that provides visibility, agency, opportunity, and voice to intersectional Latinx/POC experiences. DHPCo. also offers LatinXtensions, a mentorship and networking program focused on advising emerging Latinx and Hispanic dance artists. Founder David Herrera recently launched Latinx Hispanic Dancers United / Latinx Hispanx Danza Unidos (Spanish), a national Latinx caucus/coalition. The SF Chapter has 30+ participating artists.

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE DANCE PROGRAM

[Spring Dance Concert](#) May 6th at 8pm, 7th at 8pm, and 8th at 3 & 8pm.



SOULFORCE (MICAYA)

[SoulForce](#) was established in 2001 by Micaya and consists of a group of individuals who honor authenticity and high quality dance artistry. They strive for creating the following 3 things: community, dance excellence and an atmosphere of creative expression.

PHOTO BY EHRHMAN M.

TIM RUBEL HUMAN SHAKES

Tim Rubel Human Shakes creates dances that respond to cultural issues and asks questions about human relationships using wit, athleticism, and choreographic collaboration. [Learn more about their 2021 plans](#)

SAFEHOUSE ARTS

[SAFEhouse Arts](#) presents the West Wave Performance Workshop Series for Bay Area QT&POC performing artists from January-March 2021. The free workshops are designed for artists to develop creative work, administrative skill sets, and engage with local seniors.

CounterPulse

[CounterPulse](#) builds community by providing space and resources for emerging artists and cultural innovators and by serving as an incubator for the creation of socially relevant, community-based art and culture.



PHOTO BY KIG PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELITE NAACH ACADEMY

ELITE NAACH ACADEMY

Congratulations on becoming a 501(c)3 organization! [Follow them on Instagram](#) for more updates and join them for online and outdoor classes.

DANCE ATTACK STUDIOS – LOS GATOS

Established in 1989, [Dance Attack!](#) is a South Bay establishment with two locations, Los Gatos and Sunnyvale, offering Tap, Ballet, Jazz, Musical Theater, and inclusive classes for special needs students.

THE DANCEWRIGHT PROJECT

Influenced by director Jamie Ray Wright's background as a musician, [The DanceWright Project](#) presents works that interweave movement with American roots music and music by emerging composers.

AMY FOLEY

Amy Foley (Bellwether Dance) is [dancing on Instagram](#) (and teaching virtually).

EAST WEST MUSIC AND DANCE

With 44 years of experience, [East West Music and Dance](#) provides a fun, family-friendly, positive learning experience for performing arts students of all ages by offering group classes in jazz, ballet, tap, contemporary, lyrical and hip hop, and private lessons in piano, flute, guitar, ukulele, clarinet, and voice. Currently offering Online classes.



PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

Cherie Hill IrieDance

The mission of [IrieDance](#) is to bring dance works that are conscious, analytical, and meditational to local communities. Inspired by the African Diaspora, nature, and black feminist theory, the company creates projects that contribute to social transformation.



HELEN WICKS WORKS

[Helen Wicks Works](#) marries dance and socio-political perspectives in circus-informed aerial performance igniting the imagination of multigenerational audiences, collective envisioning, and spiritual relief throughout the pandemic.



dNAGA

[dNaga](#): Mom & Me: The Warrior Heart was inspired by a series of interviews with Shaunnah and Harriette about their experiences growing up in Oakland and their relationship with each other and their matriarchy.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOE GOODE PERFORMANCE GROUP

JOE GOODE PERFORMANCE GROUP

The [Joe Goode Annex](#) is available for small in-person rehearsals, broadcasting classes and shows, and tech support for virtual events. Contact rentals@joegoode.org for more information. Joe Goode Performance Group virtual classes, workshops, and events are also ongoing.

UPSWING AERIAL DANCE COMPANY

Pushing dance in new directions and to new heights, [UpSwing Aerial Dance Company](#) is offering virtual and small in-person classes!



GROWN WOMEN DANCE COLLECTIVE

is launching the [Pilates & Joyful Movement Life Skills Certification](#), an internationally recognized Pilates certification to build financial stability and bring arts, wellness, fitness, and pain prevention skills into their communities.

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY



PHOTO BY RAJINIKA

Sharp & Fine

[Sharp & Fine](#), founded in 2011 by sisters Megan and Shannon Kurashige, tells stories through multi-disciplinary performance works inspired by deep collaboration and empathy.



PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

Wax Poet(s)

[Wax Poet\(s\)](#) miss you. We've recently put our creative energies into [dance film](#) and [criticism](#). We hope to see y'all soon. xo, Garth and Heather



PHOTO COURTESY OF COTERIE DANCE COMPANY

Coterie DAnce Company

[Coterie DAnce Company](#) (CODA) was established March 3, 2002 by Artistic Director Kimberly B. Valmore. CODA is a contemporary dance company that performs classical ballet, modern, jazz, and Afro-Haitian inspired repertory works.

ABHINAYA DANCE



Kindling a lifelong interest in dance!



Insights into Choreography



A talk on Collaborations



PHOTO BY DANIEL GARCIA

New Ballet

[Fast Forward](#) on March 27th, featuring contemporary ballet works.



TOP PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY



(BOTTOM) PHOTO BY MONIE PORTTA

MS. RANDY & FRIENDS

[randy reyes](#) (they/them) is a queer-AfroGuatemalan choreographer, performance artist, and healer that structures choreography as excavation sites while also leading the Bay Area BIQTPOC artist-specific collective, The Hive.

VISHWA SHANTHI DANCE ACADEMY

Established in 1999, Vishwa Shanthi Dance Academy teaches Bharatanatyam as a sacred art defined by a journey of learning and its origins in culture and mythology. [Learn more](#)

ZIRU DANCE

[ZiRu Dance](#) aims to make contemporary dance an accessible and enriching experience for the Peninsula and Silicon Valley communities through the development of the Silicon Valley Dance Festival. This year's festival, "Renewal," is a year-long creative journey featuring activities that foster feelings of togetherness, even from afar. Stay tuned for virtual "Renewal" happenings coming in March.

DANA LAWTON DANCES

[Dana Lawton Dances](#) is a Bay Area based company under the leadership of choreographer, dance and yoga instructor Dana Lawton. This innovative company comprises an eclectic group of dancers from a variety of backgrounds



sjDANCEco

sjDANCEco revisits their history with footage from previous years and works not previously seen in the Bay Area. To receive this monthly blast, [sign up for their newsletter](#).



PHOTO BY RAJINIKA

Diamano Coura

Celebrating 45+ years, [Diamano Coura West African Dance Company](#) continues to preserve, educate, and appreciate West African music, dance, theater, and culture through the annual Collage des Cultures Africaines festival, March 11-13.

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Afro-Brazilian Samba with Dawn Williams

Followed by social hour



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IN CONVERSATION

I'VE BEEN THINKING A LOT about consequential strangers, or the people in our lives who “assume the supporting roles” and populate the broader reaches of our social landscapes.¹ With shelter in place, this period of prolonged distancing has stirred up recollections of the people whose presence – and absence – is mostly felt in the periphery: the city employees I stood next to while waiting in line for the bus (whom I also unconsciously raced against as I ran the six blocks between the office and the bus stop), a former coworker I'd wave to while he was on the phone in the studio hallway, and the multitude of folks I only saw in dance classes who are always there until one day, they're not.

In this series of interviews, the idea of consequential strangers converges with questions and conversations that have been percolating for Dancers' Group:

How do you build a connection with another person without physical proximity?

How do we convey to others the value artists find in creating and cultivating partnerships in a capitalist, winner-take-all environment?

What would a youth-centered issue of In Dance look like? Who is considered “youth”?

In a year that has prompted deeper investigation and understanding of equity, what discussions are dance makers participating in?

What is the next iteration of the Bay Area dance community?

For much of the past year, we've missed those fleeting, in-between times when conversations about the intersection of life and dance could happen. This yearning for candid (dare we say, even “messy”) discussion, and the people who share these moments with each other, shaped this series into an open-ended exploration of intergenerational relationships – between not-quite-strangers, closer acquaintances, and intimate friends and family – and the curiosity, insights, and ideas that emerge from making a connection.

—SHELLIE JEW, DANCERS' GROUP ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

¹ Blau, M. & Fingerman, K. L. (2009). *Consequential Strangers: The Power of People Who Don't Seem to Matter...But Really Do*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

David Herrera with Jocelyn Reyes

I wanted to see more brown bodies on stage. I wanted to not only see them but I wanted to hear their stories and have the concepts and stories be part of the narrative or the idea behind the movement.

— DAVID HERRERA



LISTEN HERE

Claudine Naganuma with Selma Apará

If we're always giving 100%, then what do we get? We're depleted. So that's an important thing for us to be able to support each other and a really important thing is to develop a circle of sisterhood.

— CLAUDINE NAGANUMA



LISTEN HERE

Maurya Kerr with Alaja Badalich

I feel like poetry brings this place where the language lets me imagine and have a sensation at the same time. In movement, our body is our medium. Poetry is its own medium because it can make language come alive.

— ALAJA BADALICH



LISTEN HERE

—AUDIO RECORDED AND EDITED BY ANDRÉA SPEARMAN, DANCERS' GROUP PROGRAM ASSISTANT

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GRASSROOTS



to

CYBERSPACE

EVOLUTIONS OF DANCING EARTH

by JADE WHAANGA



OPPOSITE PAGE PHOTO BY PAULO NOGUEIRA; PICTURED: QUIZAL GUERRERO; THIS PAGE PHOTO BY LARRY PRICE; PICTURED: ALEANDRO ALEX MERRZ

Raven Knight from *Walking At The Edge of Water*, (right) Lumhe Micco Sampson, onstage at Kowhiti Festival, Wellington Opera House, New Zealand



TO SAY IT'S HARD WORK WOULD BE AN UNDERSTATEMENT, DOING GENERATIONS OF WORK UNDOING TRAUMA, BUILDING COMMUNITY AND HEALING, SO THE FUTURE GENERATIONS CAN DANCE FREE.

Birthed from a vision from Founding Artistic Director Rulan Tangen to create global Indigenous contemporary performing arts opportunities, [Dancing Earth](#) is rooted with one foot in Yelamu – occupied Ohlone territory known as San Francisco, California and the other foot in Oгаа Po Ogeh – occupied Tewa territory known as Santa Fe, New Mexico. As they usher in a new year, we reflect on the journey of this dance organization, from grassroots to cyberspace.

Through multidisciplinary cultural contemporary arts, Dancing Earth puts the spotlight on ecological and humanitarian messages, stories, and calls to action. Dancing Earth's evolution of the past 17 years encompasses storytelling, addressing urgency of water protection, showing importance of caring for Mother Earth, global connections, online digital performance innovation, community outreach education and more. Cultivating creativity for over 50 global Indigenous and intercultural artists in these years, the first artists' journey began by exploring their ancestral embodiment through innovative forms, which expanded diversity in the performing arts.

Have you ever felt the patterns of streams and rivers running through your veins and considered what ancestral knowledge is infused in your bones?

Dancing Earth explored these concepts, peeling back layers through deep movement improvisations. Creating raw, essential, ancient and futuristic expressions. This introspective approach placed emphasis on collaborating artists' stories and expressions.

In 2004 Dancing Earth began their first series of short works at Dance Mission, *Thunderstomp*, which follows a young dancer who traces a constellation pattern on the ground, activating a vision of elemental ancestors: entities of fire, water and whirlwind who surround the dancer with a storm that connects them to the cosmos.

The cast consisted of dancers with training in break-dancing, martial arts, music and visual art. Selecting which dancer played each role was decided through the elements the dancer related to from their own cultural cosmologies. In an interview with [Hemispheric Institute](#) cast member [Thosh Collins](#) (Onk Akimel O'odham/Wa-Zha-Zhi/Haudenosaunee) shared, "Being involved with Dancing Earth, it's been able to allow me to incorporate some of my artistic expressions as a dancer and also to incorporate certain morals and values and stories and viewpoints of our people." Collins speaks to how indigeneity cannot be separated from indigenous peoples; specifically as creatives the art we create is a reflection

of who we are. Dancing Earth is a culmination of global indigenous peoples, with varying movement training and backgrounds. For many the organization acts as a creative environment to access hidden skills and knowledge. Dancers find authenticity in the choreography through bringing aspects of themselves into the work. The creative approach places emphasis on collaborating artists' stories and expressions. The intention is to bring out the unique qualities, skills and strengths of each artist.

Dancing Earth performed *Thunderstomp* at the [Red Rhythms Conference](#) at University of California, Riverside on occupied Cahuilla land. Scholars and performers from a variety of traditions and backgrounds gathered at UC Riverside for the conference organized by professors Jacqueline Shea Murphy and Michelle Raheja. This marked one of Dancing Earth's first major performances and would be the beginning of their journey as a dance company.

The following year the company would perform in Belo Horizonte, Brazil for the 5th Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, titled *Performing Heritage: Contemporary Indigenous and Community-Based Practices*. This held significance to the cast [Rulan Tangen](#), Alejandro Meraz (Purepecha), Thosh Collins, Quetzal Guerrero (Juaneño/Acjachemen/Opata/Kambiwa) as artists working in global communities and Brazil being an ancestral home for cast member Quetzal

Guerrero. This international opportunity sparked ongoing global relationship building and exchange.

As the company shared their work with more communities, people were inspired by seeing diversity represented in contemporary dance works, which sparked desire in others to be involved. There were requests for more workshops and training opportunities. Indigenous youth were hungry for creative opportunities that embraced diversity and cultural worldviews. In 2012, students Anne Pesata (Jicarilla Apache) and Lupita Salazar (Chicana) suggested longer training sessions, particularly for indigenous and rural youth who might lack the resources to attend weekly classes. This call to action led to the creation of Dancing Earth's summer intensives, dancing together outdoors. The collective considers the question "What are the stories within our bodies that connect us to land, water, sky and each other," Tangen (Kampampangan/Pangasinan/Norwegian) reveals. These summer intensives are known as spaces of reciprocity, sustainability, skill sharing, exchange, and accessing ancestral knowledge/embodied knowledge and stories we didn't know we knew. Artists from around the globe and local communities have been coming together for the last 8 summers to reground, build movement vocabulary, and exchange artistic and cultural practices. Making opportunities for the next generations of emerging Indigenous artists has always been a priority for Dancing Earth that carries through to present day.

PHOTO BY (LEFT) MORIA AMARIL, (RIGHT) COURTESY OF DANCING EARTH



PHOTO BY NORMAN SANJOS. (OPPOSITE PAGE) JONATHAN SIMS

Almost a decade later Tangen was invited by Anish-naabeg/Metis grandmothers to research the Indigenous perspectives on water issues in conjunction with the Indigenous Performance Initiative at Trent University in Canada. This led to the development of *Walking at the Edge of Water*, described by Dancing Earth as a “multi-disciplinary expression of arts dedicated to the healing of water,” created by [17 dance artists](#) and cultural advisors. In 2012 the production premiered at the [Lentic Theater](#) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Continuing Dancing Earth’s grass roots of working with what you have, sustainability and repurposing, this eco-production used costumes and props created from repurposed materials. *Walking at the Edge of Water* brought awareness to water issues, sharing stories through movement, sound and visual art. Jennifer Foerster, Muscogee poet and audience member, commented on the hope the work installed: “...Truly inspiring about the humanity and potential of all people.”

Dancing Earth worked with multiple communities gathering indigenous perspectives and stories about water. What made this production a pivotal moment in the company’s growth was the shift from introspective artist-driven stories to community members, elders, collaborators and peers being moved to share their stories after experiencing Dancing Earth’s work. The multitude of stories provided a wider scope of perspectives and detailed experiences, ideas and embodiments of their relationship to water, ultimately creating a flow of reciprocity between Dancing Earth and communities.

In the company’s ninth year they shared *Walking at the Edge of Water* on an international tour to Aotearoa (New Zealand) for the [Kowhiti Festival](#). The experience of sharing, creating, and exchanging between indigenous artists/organizations lead to building and maintaining global friendships. Dancing Earth continued to expand through international tours while balancing engagement in local communities. “Every time we offer a dance it changes depending on where we are and who is with us,” Tangen explains. Adaptability and sustainability are identified as core values of the collective.

Groundworks Alcatraz was a project developed by Dancing Earth in collaboration with California Native communities in 2018, delivering a message of urgency for [land acknowledgement](#) in the form of relationship building. Wherever you are right now, take a moment to feel the ground beneath you. Do you know the original name of this land? Or the name of the peoples who are the caretakers of this land? *Groundworks Alcatraz* centers the untold stories and creative contributions of cultural collaborators of Pomo, Ohlone, Wappo, Tongva, Paiute of California First Peoples. Gatherings took place during winter, spring and summer, culminating in a performance on Alcatraz after the Indigenous People’s Day Ceremony in the fall. Dancing Earth describes the work:



BTW US

HAVE YOU EVER LOOKED AT THE VEINS BENEATH YOUR SKIN AND WONDER WHAT STORIES RUN THROUGH YOUR BLOOD? WHAT ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE IS INFUSED IN YOUR BONES?



At Alcatraz

“Groundworks disrupts settler-colonizer notions with contemporary performance highlighting forgotten histories.”

Tangen explains this piece like an oak tree, from which acorns drop, planting new seeds. From *Groundworks Alcatraz* many side projects bloomed such as [Acorn Duet](#) (made with support of Emily Johnson/Catalyst dance), [ReIndigenize the Streets](#) (a special event centering local Native artists - produced by Tisna Ta-till-ium Parker (Ahwahnee Miwok, Kucadikadi Paiute) and co presented by [Dance Mission](#)), and *Chishkale* (a short documentary film produced by Dance Mission). Ian Garrett ([ToasterLab](#)) produced media for this work and two years later contributed as a Technical Director and Visual Artist for Dancing Earth’s first online performance.

Fast-forward to 2020, in true artist resilience despite many challenges there was also groundbreaking innovation, adaptability, and transformation. In June 2020 Dancing Earth, presented by [ToasterLab](#) and produced by [HowlRound TV](#), launched into cyberspace with their first online performance *IF: Indigenous Futurities*, expanding to include digital global creative collaboration and reach a global audience. At a time when artists were feeling the struggle of creating while in isolation, this project came at an essential time to bring global indigenous artists

together. “We come together as people from diverse backgrounds to make space of accountability and powerful calls to action,” explains Eugene Trey Pickett (Afro-Indigenous/Cherokee). The organization doesn’t shy away from addressing difficult subjects and activating change.

The cast explored finding the ways we are connected at a time of distancing, re-imagining possibilities of global cultural contemporary performance art in cyberspace and the ancestral knowledge and stories that can teach us about resilience in the remaking of the world. “One can’t assume they know everything, and this type of engagement with members of different communities is what brings us together and keeps us curious about the world we all live in,” says Lumhe Micco Sampson (Seneca/Mvskoke). *IF: Indigenous Futurities* provided a space for connection, finding the meeting places between cultures, backgrounds, knowledge, understandings and communities. The company website describes the work: “Collaborating artist visionaries reveal cyberspace as a realm of ritual, to reimagine the future from the brink of collapse of the dominant system and re-emergence of cultural cosmologies.”

Dancing Earth continued to evolve by presenting two online summer intensives, connecting Indigenous artists from around the world without the requirement of travel,



PHOTOS BY (TOP) ELIZABETH OPALENIK, (OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM) COURTESY OF DANCING EARTH, PHOTO BY DAVID K

making the program even more accessible than before. From March to November 2020, Dancing Earth held [100 online offerings](#) during the Covid-19 pandemic to keep dancers teaching, people moving, and communities connecting.

The organization closed out the year with [BTW US Cyberspace](#), a six-episode series following a journey of healing and re-discovering ancestral knowledge. This was created by transforming the original theater production of [Between Underground & Skyworld](#) into digital performance art. During a time where we see political and social issues reaching a boiling point and brought into acceleration by a pandemic, performance art continues to evolve, raise awareness and offer spaces of expression and release for individuals and collectives to process their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

The field of Indigenous contemporary performance arts has created opportunities and experiences that empower peoples. Youth who have attended workshops or performances by Dancing Earth have continued on to join the company, teach or create their own work. Like all things that grow and evolve there will be challenges, highs and lows, but it is the passion, commitment and resiliency that keeps Dancing Earth in reflection and renewal. Globally Indigenous peoples have demonstrated resilience for centuries, and that can be witnessed in their embodied expression as artists. To say it’s hard work would be an understatement, doing generations of work undoing trauma, building community and healing, so the future generations can dance free.

As [Dancing Earth](#) begins their 18th year, addressing ecological and humanitarian messages, stories and calls to action remain central to their vision. Their journey has been one of innovation and as a new year begins expect to see Dancing Earth continuing to evolve, growing like the oak tree; branches reaching towards the sky, with roots still connected deep within the Earth.

[JADE WHAANGA](#) an Aotearoa (NZ) based Indigenous Dance Artist who hails from Ngati Kahungunu. Master of Dance Studies from the University of Auckland, Jade’s work focuses on empowerment, re-claiming the Indigenous feminine body and healing historical trauma through dance as ritual. She is also the founder of [Nū Collective](#).

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