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DEC 2019

DISCOURSE & DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN, & AMPLIFY

**dancersgroup**  
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Mbongui Square Festival, Dec 20-22, Photo courtesy of artist

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## Welcome

by **DANCERS' GROUP STAFF**

*How are you doing? What's 2019 been like for you?  
Are you ready to leave this decade behind?*

*Do you hope for significant changes in 2020? There  
will be changes, there's always changes; bring on the  
changes; we're ready for some changes.*

As this year and decade draws to a conclusion Dancers' Group staff has been asking ourselves a variety of questions—including those about change. Other questions we're asking are: how are we doing? what opportunities do we imagine will take place over the next year or so?

**Wayne Hazzard**—Sharing with you has been fun. Sharing is a creative act and this input creates opportunities to fulfill desires. 2019 has affirmed my belief in the power of participating through meetings, attending presentations, and advocating for more resources for dance. These deeply engaging activities enable me to further reflect on how our creative impulses reveal limitless responses. Each inform how we can continue to be open, and share more. I'm looking forward to sharing more in 2020.

**Andréa Spearman**—2019 feels like the mark of change. Having experienced an extreme loss this year, I take value in acknowledging all accomplishments, big or small. 2019 has been such a busy year for my fledgling dance company (A. Spearman & Co.) with many performances and workshops and I've been saying that I'm "happily exhausted" all year. What makes you happily

exhausted? What has the year brought to you that made you run and hustle and compartmentalize and keel over in joy? And how can you keep that joy going in 2020? Set that coffee date with an old friend. Schedule a meeting with your mentor. Take that class that challenges your body and scrambles your brain. 2020 is the chance to renew friendships and relationships that bring you joy and keep you "happily exhausted".

**Katie Taylor**—It seems that every year lasts forever and is paradoxically gone in the blink of an eye, and 2019 was no different. "Transformation" and "gratitude" are the words that best represent my 2019. I started the year trying to survive a toxic work environment and struggling to see what my professional future could be. In the spring I decided to leave that job without a clear plan (a scary but very worthwhile choice that I highly recommend). My teaching practice made that change possible. I had classes and students to keep me focused and to help pay bills during the transition. In the summer, I started working with Dancers' Group, getting to focus my professional energy toward dance. I am grateful to have found a place to work that supports and celebrates the time I dedicate to teaching and dancing. This professional shift has given me a sense of returning and recentering, connecting the various parts of my life back to dance, the thing I love to do the most. I started the year under stress and full of worry, and I am grateful to be ending the year with a sense of ease and joy.

*How are you doing?*



**eMotion Arts**, Dec 6-7, article p. 2  
Photo by Kyle Adler



**Upswing Aerial Dance Company**,  
Dec 21-22  
Photo by Bryan Kato



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CONTENTS



ON THIS PAGE /

eMotion Arts

by Dancers' Group Staff

4 /

Cherie Hill:

A Day in the Life

by Lashon A. Daley

5 /

SPEAK

by Megan Lowe

6 /

Calendar

8 /

10 Tips When Working

with a Lighting Designer

by Allen Willner

10 /

In Memoriam: Frank Shawl

by Sima Belmar

12 /

In Practice:

with Denise Leto

by Sima Belmar and Denise Leto

eMotion Arts: A Conversation with Mariana Sobral and Susannah Faulkner

by DANCERS' GROUP STAFF



Photo by Kyle Adler

Artistic Director Mariana Sobral and Assistant Director and Company Manager Susannah Faulkner discussed their company eMotion Arts with Dancers' Group. eMotion Arts is a contemporary ballet company in their second season with a mission of spreading a message of Oneness through dance. The company's goal is to create and showcase a cohesive body of work that highlights and celebrates Oneness by bringing together dancers, artists, and their unique styles.

**How did dance enter your life? (when, where)**  
**Mariana:** For me, it was a typical start. When I was five years old in Argentina I saw Baryshnikov's *Nutcracker* on TV, and I fell in love. I wanted to do what I saw on the screen, but I didn't start dance classes for six more years. Eventually my mother was able to figure out how to make dance classes work financially, and I started movement classes first. I didn't start ballet classes until I was 11 years old. I have tried every artistic expression you can imagine, and I think dance stuck because it was the way I was most authentically able to express myself.

**Susannah:** It was similar for me. On my first birthday I went to see *The Nutcracker* in my hometown, Erie, Pennsylvania, and I haven't stopped dancing since. I started creative movement classes when I was four years old.

**Please share any stories about your relationship to dance.**  
**Susannah:** Mariana has a background in social psychology, and I have a background

in public policy and advocacy (specifically youth mental health advocacy). Dance gives expression beyond the other parts of our lives. Having different abilities and capabilities are not always embraced in ballet, but everyone at eMotion Arts comes together around the belief that everything we do can relate to dance. That's really our collective relationship to dance as a company.

**Mariana:** I believe that dance can be a refuge, and when I'm dancing I can be me, but when I was getting started I felt like I had to choose between ballet or modern (I couldn't do both). When I started I had a typical ballerina look (you could even tell I was a ballet dancer when I was walking). Because of that it was hard to break into modern—teachers would tell me that I looked too much like a ballerina. Again, Mikhail Baryshnikov was a big inspiration for me when he started doing more modern dance. He showed that it was ok for ballet dancers to do modern, and it was ok for modern dancers to have ballet training. Dance was a way to find what acceptance truly meant at a young age and that inspired the creation of eMotion Arts.

**What do you do outside/beyond dance (how do you spend other parts of your life)?**  
**Mariana:** I have two Marianas: the social psychologist and dancer and the bookkeeper and HR professional. I work in tech and aerospace and I've always taught dance. I teach every day. I think of myself as an artist who does bookkeeping, an artist that does HR. I am not a bookkeeper who dances. Everything I do is part of who I am, but my

way of thinking and how I approach things is rooted in a creative way. I try to bring all aspects of myself together as much as I can.

**Susannah:** For all of my 20s I was trying to make myself into a public policy advocate and researcher and let dance become a hobby. I was always teaching, doing gigs and freelance work, but I could never quite let dance become a hobby. Now I say I'm an artist and an advocate. I find a way to bring dance into whatever I'm doing. I've learned that there are some things that you can't escape because it's so fundamental to who you are, and for me dance is fundamental to who I am. Now I'm trying to integrate it all together.

**Describe eMotion Arts' work or choreographic style.**  
**Mariana:** I call our style contemporary ballet because it has such a strong ballet influence. We use the language of ballet to explore new themes that ballet has not traditionally worked in. I strongly believe that we need to bring ballet into 2019, especially through the themes being explored. eMotion Arts works on topics like immigration, mental health, acceptance, and oneness. We're trying to break from ballet's demand for uniformity into oneness where we can all dance together without losing ourselves by trying to look exactly the same as the dancers around us. I think of this idea in the same way as English speakers don't just keep writing Lord Byron and Shakespeare. We can be current. In exploring these tough themes we can give the audience seeds of ideas and provoke conversations.



Our work speaks to audiences in different ways, and I want each audience member to be able to see themselves in the work in some way.

**What are you currently working on?**

**Mariana:** Our December show is the end of our second season. We’re showing some work we’ve been exploring over these last two years and bringing in some friends to perform.

One piece you’ll see at our December show is an excerpt of our full-length work *Ubi*, which touches on acceptance, compassion, and oneness and the lack of these. We explore how these ideas impact our relationships with one another.

In *Act of the Dreamer* we explore the soul journey of an immigrant. We look at the full journey, from the moment the immigrant decides to leave a place that is known and comfortable and come to a place that is unfamiliar. The piece looks at how you try to adapt to a new environment and society without losing yourself. We ask how much individuality can you keep without ostracizing yourself? These themes are broader than the immigrant experience and are really rooted in transitions and adjustments, so it’s relatable to any audience member.

We’re also showing *Tanguera*, a piece about shedding stereotypes, and *Sombro*, a piece based on the poet Alfonsina Storni who committed suicide by walking into the ocean. These pieces will also be the starting places for our work in our third season next year.

**Susannah:** *Adagio* is a new collaboration with a local violinist. The dancers have put together different sections that play on the relationship of music and dance. We’ve described this process as a dance lab, working with a musician to deconstruct the song, explore intention, and express the different feelings in the music.

We also have some eMotion Arts dancers presenting work at this show. eMotion Arts is a place where the dancers can find their own artistic voice. It’s a collaborative and accepting environment, and I’m so blessed to have dancers, company members, and collaborators who embrace that.

**Please tell us about your decision to have an educational focus to your work (you have a training program and a company – why is having both important to you?).**

**Mariana:** At eMotion Arts we have a youth mentorship program. We have younger dancers who are interested in performing in a serious way, so we do workshops and master classes in addition to our regular classes. All of this is in the spirit of supporting dancers in finding their artistic voices. Even through cueing in class we try to center the dancers in their own work, so we’ll say “start to feel yourself point your toes” instead of “think about pointing your toes.” We believe that if dancers start finding their identities and embrace them at a young age, when they grow up they’ll be more connected to themselves. And we can give them a place where they can come back to and know they will be accepted. There is so much negativity, bullying, and discrimination, especially in our current political climate, and so it’s important for us to create as many safe places as we can. This is also why we’re touching on mental health in our next season.

**What’s a future goal for eMotion Arts?**

**Susannah:** I work closely with Mariana on the organizational side of things. I have a background in grant writing, and our future goal is to secure a grant to put on a full show of *Act of the Dreamer*. We got to present it for West Wave at Joe Goode Annex and Zohar Performance Series in Palo Alto this year. *Act of the Dreamer* is such a special piece, and the dancers have taken it to the next level. We’re working to bring together other Bay Area choreographers who are immigrants, refugees, and people of color to have a dance forum on immigration.

**Who or what inspires you?**

**Mariana:** The human experience in general. For a long time I was just teaching and wanted to have a company. Joe Landini gave me space to get started. I get inspiration from feelings, from stories, and from music in general and from the dancers in the moment. *Act of the Dreamer* came about after I spoke with a friend who is a composer who put music to a poem of a DACA student. In the



process of creating I allow myself to connect with the music, the moment, the dancers that I have, and what I want to say. It’s the creative human experience.

**Susannah:** I was at a concert, and one of the performers played a new piece on a violin. After the concert I asked the artist to use her music, and we’re meeting next week to collaborate. I’ve had this piece in my mind about youth climate resistance, and I was waiting for music to hit me. Being present can be so inspiring. We did a piece with a visual artist all about how ideas come to you, and how as artists we’re conduits for ideas. I think we have a duty to each other, to humanity, and to the planet to express inspiration when it strikes. I’m so grateful to see people expressing their inspiration.

**Do you have a favorite song or type of music to dance to?**

**Mariana:** It depends on my mood. I love tango, jazz, musicals, and good flamenco-style guitar. I have a tendency to prefer music that is soothing. I love to work with Max Richter’s music for choreography.

**Susannah:** Our warm up playlists are all over the place. Lizzo has had a big presence lately. I love classical covers of alternative rock songs, and I did a piece to Florence and the Machine. As a group it really depends on our mood. We have such a collective group energy at this point, we can usually tell what kind of music is right for the moment.

**What’s a piece of advice that you still hold onto?**

**Mariana:** Two pieces of advice from my mom that have really stuck with me: “if you don’t have anything nice to say then don’t say it” and “make sure your words are sweet in case you have to swallow them back down.” It makes me take a pause when I want to hit back and remembering this advice helps me to not recycle bad energy.

The other advice that I hold onto is that “it’s ok.” It’s ok that we don’t have the same point of view. My experience is not your experience and that’s ok. I’m not you and you are not me and that’s ok. This advice helps me stop trying to control everything in my life. The only thing I can control is how things affect and define me.

**Susannah:** My grandfather used to always remind me to “wait for the right fit and you’ll know.” I didn’t get that at the time, and I was trying to put square pegs in round holes. My grandfather had a lifetime of experience of being a big band drummer and working as a journalist. He overcame so much in his life. I think so often as artists we try to adjust ourselves to fit. On your artist journey, wait for the right fit. If you don’t find the right fit, create it.

**What haven’t we asked that you want people to know?**

**Mariana:** We are on a mission of getting eMotion Arts into the world. If anyone sees what we do and wants to talk or collaborate, we have an open door. We like to bring the dance community together.

**MARIANA SOBRAL** is the Artistic Director of eMotion Arts. She began her study of ballet as a student of the Escuela Nacional de Danzas in Argentina. Later, she attended the University of Buenos Aires where she studied Dance in the newly created Performing Arts program. Her performance experience includes working as a Principal Dancer and Soloist in many traditional classical, and contemporary ballet works like “Giselle”, “The Sleeping Beauty”, “Coppelia”, “La Bayadere”, and “Who Cares?” among many others.

Over the years Mariana developed ballet programs and award-winning choreography for many studios in the Bay Area. At Dance Attack (as their Ballet Mistress) she created the ballet syllabus used today in both locations, developed their pre-pointe assessment program, and choreographed pieces for their companies. She also taught ballet and directed students of all ages and experience levels for Ballet San Jose School (now New Ballet School), Bay Area Dance School, Santa Clara Ballet, South Bay Dance Center, Pacific Ballet Academy, Peninsula Ballet Theater, and San Jose State University.

Marana’s work has been seen in San Francisco as part of the RAW Artist residency at SAFEhouse Arts, SF Movement Arts Festival, The DanceWright Project, Zohar Performance Series, Oakland Dance Festival, and also in Regional, National, and International competitions where they earned her a range of choreography awards. Last September, her choreography “Caritas” was presented at PUSHfest, obtaining the Audience Favorite Award.

**SUSANNAH FAULKNER** is an Erie, Pennsylvania native who started her training in ballet, modern, jazz, and hip-hop at Erie Bayfront Dance (now Erie Dance Theater) and Lake Erie Ballet. She is a graduate of the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for the Arts, as a ballet major, and attended various regional intensives and festivals. After performing, teaching, and choreographing for schools and companies in New York, Colorado, and England for a decade, she is now dancing with eMotion Arts Dance Co. in San Francisco and teaching master classes locally and nationally. Her passion for dance blends with her studies and work in public policy, politics, and activism holding a BA in Politics from Ithaca College and an MPA in Social Policy from the London School of Economics. In addition to performing with eMotion Arts Dance Co, she is the newly appointed Assistant Director & Company Manager.





# CHERIE HILL: A Day in the Life

by LASHON A. DALEY

**AS A BLACK-DANCE SCHOLAR AND DANCER,** I recently became curious about the methods and stamina—or shall I say “hustle”—that is required in order to maintain dance and dance scholarship as a top priority in my life. As a guest dancer in Hill’s newest work, *She-Verse*, I had the opportunity to sit down with her after a recent rehearsal and receive insight into her daily hustle.

This is a day in her life.

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2019**

**6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.**

Cherie spends the first hour of her day meditating. She sits up quietly on her bed after waking, focusing on inner light and sound. She has been practicing these principles of Surat Shabd Yoga for nearly twenty years. Nearly twenty minutes in, her mind finally begins to rest.

**7:30 a.m.**

Her cell phone alarm rings and she shifts to turn it off. She checks her phone for important texts or missed calls. Thankfully, there are none. She puts her phone down and heads to the kitchen.

**7:35 a.m.**

She prepares herself an assortment of snacks to eat throughout her workday: a pear, a bag of crackers, a dollop of hummus, and an energy bar. On some days she will prepare herself a green tea, but not today.

**7:50 a.m.**

Cherie takes a shower and brushes her teeth. She stands in front of her dresser and pulls out comfortable pants to move in, a tank top and a light sweater. She double checks that she has her keys, cell phone, water bottle, and wallet in her backpack. She has two other bags for the family dance classes she will teach today filled with two signs, a stereo, tablet, CDs, pens, the lesson, a small drum, cups, a pitcher, cookies, and scarves for props.

**8:10 a.m.**

She spends the next few minutes reviewing the plans for the day with her partner of twenty-one years, Ithiel. Their 13-year-old son, Urijah, not only needs to be driven to his soccer game but also needs a ride to join his friend for their first big concert tonight at the Oakland Coliseum.

**8:15 a.m.**

Cherie returns to her kitchen and eats a handful of grapes and strawberries before hailing her Lyft.

**8:30 a.m.**

Her Lyft arrives and drives her to the Richmond Bart station. In the car, she scans her email and begins to prepare herself for an hour-long phone meeting on equity and diversity with Hope Mohr Dance. Four months ago, Cherie began working with the company on their community engagement projects and residencies. This call is a part of that ongoing work.

**8:45 a.m.**

Cherie exits the Lyft, gathers her bags, and heads to the train platform. She settles herself and puts her headphone jack into her phone.

**9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.**

Just as her call begins, the train arrives. Cherie gathers her bags again. Inside the train, she heads to an empty row. Over the next half hour, despite the noise and distractions, Cherie communicates her thoughts to the group. She then exits at 19th Street Oakland and heads into one of her favorite local coffee shops, Tierra Mia. She places her bags down at a corner table and orders a green tea. For the rest of the call she dialogues with

the group, collaborating on insightful information to strengthen equity and diversity efforts within the company.

**10:00 a.m.**

As soon as the call ends, Cherie hails another Lyft to the West Oakland Library where she and her co-instructor Rossana will teach a free family dance class.

**10:15 a.m.**

Cherie meets Rossana in the main meeting room, unpacks the signs from her bag and places one outside the room and the other near the library’s front entrance. She then organizes the sign-in sheet and the refreshments. For the last few minutes, she and Rossana check in and review their lesson plan for today’s class.

**10:30 a.m.**

Cherie and Rossana greet the families as they arrive. Gentle-sounding music is playing in the background. Since the course is free and families are not required to sign up prior, Cherie is never sure about how many families or which families will attend. MPACT, which stands for Moving Parents and Children Together, is a program provided through Luna Dance Institute, where Cherie is a dance teaching artist. The goal of the course is to use dance as a means for families to connect and bond. The curriculum is relationship-based and works with creative dance and attachment theory. It is specially designed for families that are in the process of reunification, although all families are welcomed to join. In addition, Cherie is particularly invested in the program being available to families of color living in neighborhoods with fewer resources. Today’s class begins with three families: three adults and five children.

**10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

Cherie and Rossana gather everyone to form a circle. They start with introductions and then play a name game. They warm up their bod-

ies saw in the class and what they felt were challenges with the curriculum. They also spend some time thinking about ways to promote the course and involve more families. With the cultural changes occurring in Oakland, they want to promote the program’s original goals and ensure they serve families that the program was originally intended for.

**12:20 p.m. to 12:40 p.m.**

Cherie is happy to see Ithiel and Urijah pull up to the library. She remembers that it is a big day for Urijah who is attending his first concert. She takes in her son’s excitement and enjoys these few moments of being with her family as they drive through traffic to drop her off at the 81st Avenue Branch library in East Oakland for her next class.

**12:40 p.m. to 1:05 p.m.**

Now at the next location, Cherie heads inside of the library towards the back classroom where her second co-teacher-of-the-day, Aiano, is stacking up the chairs in order to clear the space for the next MPACT class. They greet one another, and like she did earlier with Rossana, Cherie and Aiano prepare for the lesson.

**1:05 p.m.**

Cherie walks towards the main lobby and asks the librarian to make an announcement that their class is starting. Cherie quickly scours the library to personally invite families to join. Five families consisting of six adults and eight children attend the class.

**1:10 p.m. to 2:05 pm**

Although she is co-teaching the same lesson she did earlier, it feels different. Cherie is vibing off of Aiano’s fast-paced energy.

**2:05 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.**

With snacks in hand, Cherie and Aiano prepare next Saturday’s lesson. They debrief about what they experienced with the families and plan the lesson for next week. By the time they pack up, it is nearly an hour and a

**4:15 pm to 6:00 p.m.**

Cherie and Ithiel settle into home-life. After meditating for twenty minutes to wash away the day’s stresses, Cherie heads to the kitchen to make herself a late lunch—a vegan cheese quesadilla with avocado. She relaxes while watching a few episodes of *Caribbean Life* and daydreams about one day opening up a bed and breakfast/artist residency on a Caribbean island somewhere.

**6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.**

Cherie begins preparing for *She-Verse*’s rehearsal the next morning. They have a show-in-progress on Wednesday, and Cherie needs to solidify the work’s sections and order. She calls Imani, the piece’s video artist, about video edits. She texts back and forth with Brizion about the music for the piece. Moving around her living room, she shifts between marking the choreography and taking notes. She is unsure about the section transitions but mentally maps out what she thinks will work for Wednesday’s showing.

**8:00 p.m. to 9:15 p.m.**

Ithiel tells Cherie that dinner is ready and they eat—just the two of them. After dinner, they tidy up various parts of the house, mixed in with resting and daydreaming.

**9:15 p.m. to 10:45 p.m.**

Similar to her morning, Cherie is back to packing her bags for the next day’s rehearsals and photo shoot. She packs some of the costumes for her dancers, her tablet, her journal full of rehearsal notes, a portable projector, makeup, and lots of hair ties. She texts her dancers to remind them about rehearsal and the photo shoot. She then maps out her plans for her second rehearsal at USF while Ithiel goes to pick up Urijah. Cherie rejoices in the few moments of alone time and jumps around her house with the last bit of her energy.

**11:00 p.m.**

Before falling asleep Cherie reminds herself that despite how full the next day will be,



Photos by Robbie Sweeney and the Tenderloin National Forest



ies to movements based in neurodevelopment patterns following a series of explorations of space and energy. They dance together; they dance apart. They shake and wiggle—bursting in different ways. During a kids-only dance section, Cherie speaks with the adults, learning more about their adult and child relationship, pointing out the kids’ dance accomplishments. Soon the kids finish, and they all reunite back into their family units, form a circle, and perform a goodbye dance.

**11:30 a.m. to 12:20 p.m.**

As the families leave, Cherie and Rossana pack up and leave the lively meeting room. They head back into the library and find a quiet place to snack and reflect on what they

half later, and Cherie sends Ithiel a message to let him know she is ready. She responds to emails while she waits.

**3:45 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.**

As they head home, they drive near the crowds heading towards the Coliseum. Cherie imagines Urijah flowing in the midst of the crowd—her young son amongst these young adults. She remembers him in the car earlier and reminisces about the clothes he had on and the cologne he was wearing. A rush of sentiment comes over her as she relishes in the gratitude of the moment—her son is growing up and she is grateful to be able to witness it.

she will enjoy the moment, take it one step at a time, be present, and breathe. She feels extremely busy, but the artistic opportunities she’s engaged in make it worth it.

Cherie premieres *She-Verse*, a multi-media piece inspired by drifting water, land, ancestors, bravery, and eco-feminism, this December 5-7 and 12-14 at CounterPulse in San Francisco. Tickets can be purchased at [counterpulse.org](http://counterpulse.org).

LASHON A. DALEY is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at UC Berkeley. As a scholar, dancer and writer, Lashon thrives on bridging communities together through movement and storytelling.





# Discovering the Power and Ability to Take Action

by MEGAN LOWE

I AM DEEPLY IMMERSED in contact improvisation and site-specific dance—exploring the possibilities/capabilities of my body in relationship to other bodies and in relationship to space/architecture. I crave the feeling of earth in my core, sensing the ground through my dance partner's core, and finding the gravitational center of an object. Even now, as I write this, I get little butterflies in my stomach, alluding to that connection of centers: to move and be moved; to respond and elicit a response; to be thrilled by surprise, yet ready for anything. Climbing, falling, and folding into and out of floors, walls, windows, stairs, ledges, edges, and bodies, I test the laws of physics diligently. I am on a never-ending search for new discoveries through proficient movement generation, tackling unusual physical situations and coming up with compelling solutions. It feels strange writing about this thing I love so much, instead of just doing it. I want to get up and dance. But as I sit here, I am reminded that I am constantly moving and connecting—my dance practice informs everything I do and how I interact with the world.

The way my body makes slight adjustments to stay standing on a train that jerks to start and stop. The instinct that kicks in for me to counterbalance, gaining a little more length to obtain something that was just out of reach. The recruiting of my entire body to lift heavy objects in a safe and sustainable way. The ability I have to fall with little impact, working with gravity instead of against it. I recall a time when I was traveling fast on my bike and the front tire got stuck in a grate, flipping the bike in the air and launching me off it. Amazingly, I was able to land safely, with my backpack still on, and everything intact. Often in these moments, I find myself thinking, “Woah! Good thing I’m a dancer.” Never did I imagine that I would need to call upon my skills as a dancer during a life-threatening assault.

## Potentially Triggering Story:

At 4 a.m. on December 30, 2018, my partner and I were woken by a woman screaming for help outside our home. We opened our window, and saw her and another stranger being assaulted. We yelled at the man attacking them to stop, but the violence continued. As my partner called the police, I ran to the front door. When I opened it, I noticed the attacker had started bludgeoning the male victim with a fire extinguisher—it was clear to me in this moment that he was trying to kill them, that these victims were just trying to get away, and that there was no time to wait for the police to arrive—so I made a split-second decision and urged the victims to come into our home for protection.

It was like a horror movie—the victims hobbled down the sidewalk while their attacker slowly walked behind them, knowing he could easily catch up. I remember thinking there was no way they were going to make it up the stairs before their attacker did, but the victims made it into our home and I slammed and locked the door behind them. The male victim was bleeding profusely from his head, face, and leg, and he had been stabbed multiple times. While my partner was on the phone with the police, our roommate and I looked for things to stop the bleeding. Then the attacker started breaking down our door. My partner went to hold the door while the victims hid in the bathroom. We tried to reason with the attacker, but to no avail. No human words came from him, just screaming, growling, and roaring. Then the enraged man broke our window with the fire extinguisher. There was glass everywhere.



Photo by John Carnahan



Photo by Sebastian Arrua

**The Ability to Take Action:** Feet firmly planted, knees bent, hands tightly gripping a table near the broken window, I harnessed the power of the ground and felt its connection to my core and my connection to the object's center, and I threw the large, heavy table up in one fell swoop to block the window.

**The Ability to Take Action:** As the door started coming off the hinges, I ran to help my partner hold the door. Firmly planting my feet into the floor again, I channelled that power through my legs, my torso, my arms, and pressed my entire being into the one thing between us and this unseen, but very much felt and heard attacker.

**The Ability to Take Action:** Through the cracks of the door, the attacker unloaded the contents of the fire extinguisher into our home. The chemicals made it hard to breathe and see. All I could do at that point was sense through my skin, muscle, and bone, trying to maintain functionality. The door completely detached from the frame and became a floating shield. I could feel the floor through my partner's core via the door. Coordination became a necessity, as I could not press too hard or too little at the wrong moment, or the door would flip. I also had to react accordingly to the volatile entity on the other side with no way to visually predict what he was going to do next. This was a feat of deeply physical listening to my ally, and to my enemy, through a large object.

**The Ability to Take Action:** The attacker's hands and legs started forcing their way in. He kept body slamming the door and ended up successfully pushing through, bursting

his way into our home. I was the first point of contact; his hands grabbed at my face, and ripped at the insides of my mouth. All I could think of was getting this intruder out of our home, and that I needed to continue to push back without being overtaken—a harsh negotiation of balance. Our roommate pulled the attacker off me. Then my partner pulled the attacker off our roommate, and towards the gaping exit. I rushed to get a tall stool, using its weight, density, and length to help push the intruder out. No longer able to use the stool in our narrow entryway, I threw it aside and went to rush the attacker.

**The Ability to Take Action:** We got the intruder out of our home, but as we did, he grabbed my braid and attempted to throw me down the flight of stairs. While my partner was trying to get him off me, I counterbalanced against the attacker, pressing away from the railing with my left hand and sending my pelvis weight in the opposite direction of him, while holding his arm in place with my right hand so my hair did not completely rip out of my head. (Throughout my career as a dancer, I am constantly grateful for my understanding of how to use counterbalancing to aid my everyday life, but never more so than during this instance.)

It felt like it took forever for the police to arrive, but they made it in this moment. They had to taser the attacker multiple times to get him to stop. Even after they fully restrained him, we could see that he kept fighting and trying to come back. I have never seen someone so enraged and out of control. Once the attacker was apprehended, the police questioned us outside in the cold, with nothing on but our torn, blood-soaked pajamas. We were then released to return to our broken home that was filled with glass, wood shards, chemical residue, hair, and blood—left to figure out what to do next all on our own.

This is the most traumatic event that has occurred in my life. I never thought that saving two strangers would have resulted in such a brutal attack on our household. As a result, our door and window were destroyed, and our flooring had to be completely ripped out due to blood contamination. We were out of our home for three weeks while repairs were being made. We had to replace much of our furniture and belongings. We continue needing to take time off work, have meetings, manage paperwork and bills, and attend medical appointments. However, the psychological impact of this event has been the most difficult to deal with. At least I can take solace in the fact that everyone is alive; a couple months later I received a letter from one of the victims:

*Megan was a complete stranger who risked her own life to save two random people in her parking lot. She had no obligation to help us, but out of the kindness of her heart she did. There were plenty of other neighbors who had come outside during all of the commotion, but Megan and her roommates were the only people who tried to help. I have no doubt in my mind that if she would have waited any longer, or just stood and watched like the other people around, I would not be here today. That night was the scariest thing that has ever*

Continued on pg 9 »

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DEC 2019

# calendar

VISIT THE ONLINE COMMUNITY CALENDAR, to find additional events and to submit a performance. [dancersgroup.org](http://dancersgroup.org)

## Epiphany Dance Theater

Z Space, SF

*Rock & Mortar* explores the links between people and place. An all-women cast will lead audiences on a path in and around Z Space. The ensemble includes Heather Arnett, Alegra Bautista, Nuria Bowart, Shaghayegh Cyrous, Kim Epifano, Jhia Jackson, Nehara Kalev, Zoë Klein, Jenny McAllister, Lucrezia Palandri and Kaylamay Paz Suarez. Wed-Sat, Dec 4-7, 6:30pm and 8:30pm, Sun, Dec 8, 4pm, \$30.

[epiphanydance.org](http://epiphanydance.org)

## Cherie Hill IrieDance and Gabriel Christian & Chibueze Crouch

Counterpulse, SF

Join CounterPulse for new community-driven, multimedia dance works by Cherie Hill IrieDance and Gabriel Christian/Chibueze Crouch that examine ecofeminism and religion through the lens of African Diasporic narratives. Thu-Sat, Dec 5-7 and 12-14, 8pm, \$20-35 and pay-what-you-can Thursday.

[counterpulse.org](http://counterpulse.org)

## San Francisco State University

McKenna Theater SFSU, SF

*PASSION FOOTPRINTS: New Moves Student Choreography Showcase* presents the works of the advanced choreography students, focusing on the themes that are close to their hearts and inform their creative processes. Thu-Sat, Dec 5-7, 7:30pm; Sun, Dec 8, 2pm, \$10.

[theatredance.sfsu.edu](http://theatredance.sfsu.edu)

## Scott Wells & Dancers

Dance Mission Theater, SF

Presenting three new works: In *Muscle Memory* tango meets acrobatics within a story of



San Francisco State University / photo by Sreang Hok



Dandelion Dance Theater / Courtesy of Artist



Cairo Cabaret / photo by Rachel Duff Photography

searching for home by Scott Wells & Dancers. Megan Lowe Dances will perform *Finger Trap*, a deep dive into physical puzzles while treading on the surface of shared ancestry. *Quick Twitch*, an ensemble work exploring social forces and human catapults, features Mira Barakat, Megan Lowe, Kristen Rulifson, Scott Wells, Shira Yaziv, and surprise guest appearances. Thu-Sat, Dec 5-7, 8pm; Sun, Dec 8, 7pm, \$20-25.

[scottwellsdance.com](http://scottwellsdance.com)

## eMotion Arts

SAFEhouse for the Performing Arts, SF

This performance marks the culmination of eMotion Arts' second season, directed by Mariana Sobral. The concert combines diverse voices to deepen our stories and ask the audience to reflect on current events and how our reactions to them can define us as individuals and as a society. Fri-Sat, Dec 6-7, 8pm, \$15-20.

[safehousearts.org](http://safehousearts.org)

## ODC Pilot Program

ODC Dance Commons, SF

ODC presents *Pilot 72: Hatched*, an evening of new works by six emerging Bay Area choreographers. Sat, Dec 7, 8pm; Sun, Dec 8, 4pm and 8pm, \$15.

[odc.dance](http://odc.dance)

## Rhea Speights and STEAM-ROLLER Dance Company

SAFEhouse for the Performing Arts, SF

*Dances for Ironing* is Rhea Speights' latest work that elevates the supposedly insignificant with a series of small, overlapping dances. STEAMROLLER's latest work *Kiki Extravaganza* is an immersive, interactive dance theater performance. Fri-Sat, Dec 13-14, 8pm, \$15-20.

[safehousearts.org](http://safehousearts.org)

## Ultimate Alliance Dance Company and Strong Pulse Dance Crew

City College of San Francisco Wellness Center

Ultimate Alliance Dance Company and Strong Pulse Dance Crew Presents *Creative Arts*. Guest artists include Mariia S, Bliss Dance Company, Jefferson H.S., Tre Henderson, Rising Rhythm, Velvet, Desert Jewels, George Washington High, and Skorpio. Fri-Sat, Dec 13-14, 7pm, \$15.

[eventbrite.com](http://eventbrite.com)

## LINES Ballet | Training Program

Dance Mission Theater, SF

This versatile evening will feature a collection of new works by esteemed faculty artists Christian Burns and Carmen Rozestraten, internationally renowned choreographer Roderick George (kNonAmeArtist), and local guest artist Robert Moses (Robert Moses' Kin). Fri-Sun, Dec 13-15, 7pm, \$22.

[linesballet.org](http://linesballet.org)

## Mbongui Square Festival

Various locations

Organized by Kiandanda Dance Theater, the Mbongui Square Festival is an interdisciplinary arts and multicultural community project that gathers dance, music, visual arts and spoken word artists of varied styles, from the Bay Area and across the world. The Festival reflects Artistic Director Byb Chanel Bibene's aspiration to strengthen the concept of community through the arts. Dec 15-22, times and prices vary.

[mbonguifest.org](http://mbonguifest.org)



Epiphany Dance Theater, Rock & Mortar / Photo by Eric Poggenpohl





# Holiday Treats



SF Ballet/ Photo by Eric Tommason

## Smuin Contemporary Ballet Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts

*The Christmas Ballet* features two acts with both classical ballet and festive contemporary numbers, including time-honored favorites and brand-new surprises set to holiday tunes and incorporating ballet, tap, jazz, and swing. Sun, Dec 1, 2pm, \$25-93.

[smuinballet.org](http://smuinballet.org)

## Ballet Folklórico México Danza

**San Leandro Performing Arts Center**

This Holiday season experience Ballet Folklórico México Danza's 8th annual *Nutcracker Piñata*, a tradition infused with Mexican folklore. *Nutcracker Piñata* takes Clara on a journey to different regions in México where she discovers beautiful dances and exciting celebrations. Sun, Dec 1, 3pm, \$15-\$25.

[mexicodanza.com](http://mexicodanza.com)

## ODC/Dance

**YBCA Theater, SF**

Told through music, dance, and a powerful narrative, *The Velveteen Rabbit* celebrates the unique relationship between a little boy and his stuffed rabbit, and the enduring power of love. Thu-Fri, Dec 5-6, 11am; Sat, Dec 7, 1pm and 4pm; Sun, Dec 1 & 8, 2pm, \$15-\$100.

[odcdance.org](http://odcdance.org)

## Mark Foehringer Dance Project|SF

**Cowell Theatre, SF**

Mark Foehringer's *Nutcracker Sweets* is a 50-minute version of the *Nutcracker* specifically designed for families with young children. The production features a live 9-piece chamber orchestra, with music direction by Michael Morgan. Sat-Sun, Dec 7-8, 11am and 1pm; Sat-Sun Dec 14-15 and 21-22, 11am, 1pm, 4pm, \$20.50-\$42.50.

[mfdpsf.org](http://mfdpsf.org)

## \*Black Diamond Ballet

**Creative Arts Building, Pittsburg**

Black Diamond Ballet returns for the 8th year with Sharon Sobel Idul's version of *The Nutcracker*, the only full-length version in Contra Costa County that features professional dancers, students and community performers. Sat, Dec 7, 7pm; Sun, Dec 8, 2pm, \$15-25.

[blackdiamondballet.org](http://blackdiamondballet.org)

## Stapleton Ballet

**Marin Veteran's Memorial Auditorium, San Rafael**

Now in its 31st year, *Stapleton Ballet's Nutcracker* production features inspired dancing,

exquisite costumes and lavish sets, with over 250 dancers from the Stapleton School of Performing Arts. Complimentary meet-and-greet with costumed characters after 1pm matinees. Sat-Sun, Dec 7-8, 1pm and 5pm, \$26-39.

[stapletonschool.org](http://stapletonschool.org)

## San Francisco Lesbian/ Gay Freedom Band

**Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater, SF**

*Dance-Along Nutcracker®* started in 1985 as a fundraiser for the LGBTQ+ community and has evolved into the San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Band's signature annual event. *Dance-Along Nutcracker* blends Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* with contemporary music in a new show each year, encouraging the audience to become part of the show whenever the "Dance-Along!" sign illuminates. Accessible to families of any configuration. Sat, Dec 7, 3pm and 7pm, Sun, Dec 8, 11am and 3pm, \$35-\$50.

[dancealongnutcracker.org](http://dancealongnutcracker.org)

## San Francisco Ballet

**San Francisco War Memorial Opera House**

*Helgi Tomasson's Nutcracker* returns to the SF Opera House. A special 75th anniversary commemorative book will be made free of charge to all guests. Passport Performances offer an enhanced *Nutcracker* experience at no extra cost, treating guests to plush toy prizes, costumed character greetings, a keepsake mini passport, free treats at intermission, and carolers in the lobby, all within the price of admission. Wed-Sun, Dec 11-29, various showtimes, \$25-299.

[sfballet.org](http://sfballet.org)

## Smuin Contemporary Ballet

**Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater, SF**

*The Christmas Ballet* features two acts with both classical ballet and festive contemporary

numbers, including time-honored favorites and brand-new surprises set to holiday tunes and incorporating ballet, tap, jazz, and swing. Special addition: This year, Smuin will present an extra LGBTQ+ performance in San Francisco only, with special guest Lady Camden in the role of "Santa Baby". Thu-Sun, Dec 12-23, various times, \$25-\$97.

[smuinballet.org](http://smuinballet.org)

## The New Ballet

**Hammer Theatre Center, San Jose**

Presented in partnership with History San Jose, *The San Jose Nutcracker* tells the well-loved story of Clara and the *Nutcracker*, while featuring historical references to the heritage that has made Santa Clara Valley the center of innovation. The New Ballet Orchestra, led by Thomas Shoebotham, accompanies the performances. Fri, Dec 13, 7-9pm, \$39.50-\$125.

[newballet.com](http://newballet.com)

## \*Menlowe Ballet

**Menlo-Atherton Performing Arts Center, Atherton**

*It's a Wonderful Nutcracker* combines the magic and awe of a traditional *Nutcracker* with inspiration from Frank Capra's iconic 1940s film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. An international cast features a roster of ballet artists and ballroom dancers. Fri, Dec 13, 7pm; Sat, Dec 14, 2pm and 7pm; Sun, Dec 15, 2:30pm; Sat, Dec 21, 2pm and 7pm; Sun, Dec 22, 2:30pm, \$29-\$62.

[menloweballet.org](http://menloweballet.org)

## Sacred Heart Men's Club

**Sacred Heart Church, Saratoga**

Kerry Irish Productions Presents *An Irish Christmas* taking you on a magical journey through Christmas in Ireland with superb dancing, singing and traditional Irish music celebrating the international spirit of the holiday season. Sat, Dec 14, 7:30-10pm, \$45-\$90

[Sacredheartsaratoga.tix.com](http://Sacredheartsaratoga.tix.com)

## Academy of Classical Ballet-CA

**Campbell Heritage Theatre**

The 10th anniversary holiday performance of *A Winter Wonderland*, which celebrates the season as well as the holiday spirit. Sat, Dec 14, 3:15pm; Sun, Dec 15, 2pm, \$20-\$25.

[aocballet.com](http://aocballet.com)

## Marin Ballet

**Marin Veteran's Memorial Auditorium, San Rafael**

Lavish Victorian costumes and sets frame choreography by Julia Adam and a cast of over 150 local dancers in *Marin Ballet's Nutcracker*. Meet costumed characters immediately following 1pm performances.

Sat-Sun, Dec 14-15, 1pm and 5pm, \$25-\$45.

[marinballet.org](http://marinballet.org)

## Berkeley Ballet Theater

**Holy Names University, Oakland**

*Robbie Nichols and Sally Streets' The Nutcracker* features BBT's Youth Division dancers as well as guest artists from around the Bay Area. Sugar Plum Fairy Parties available after select performances. Fri, Dec 20, 7pm; Sat, Dec 21, 11am, 3pm and 7pm; Sun, Dec 22, 11am and 3pm, \$45.

[berkeleyballet.org](http://berkeleyballet.org)

## Dandelion Dancetheater

**Dandelion Theater Studio, Oakland**

Come find joy and community connection during a celebration of the Winter Solstice, the beginning of Hanukkah, and any other things that need some celebratin' with good food, inclusive community, and Ecstatic Jewish Dancing for all bodies led by Dandelion's Bruce Bierman. The Ecstatic Jewish Dancing will transform into an open ended dance-party and music jam, Dandelion-style. Wheelchair Accessible East Bay Venue (address shared with RSVP). Sat, Dec 21, 6pm, **FREE**.

[dandeliondancetheater.org](http://dandeliondancetheater.org)



Berkeley Ballet Theater / photo by Natalia Perez

## UpSwing Aerial Dance Company

**Studio 12 at UpSwing Aerial Dance Company, Berkeley**

Produced every other year since 2005, *Solstice!* celebrates the longest night of the year with music and dance. Experience David Worm's soaring, blues-inflected vocals, Amar Singh Khalsa's magical flute and Sahib Amar Kaur Khalsa's deeply moving viola. Aerialists performing are Kirstin Brown, Hannah Dworkin, Helen Fitantes, Alissa Kaplan Soto, Elizabeth Scotten, Helium Valentine and Cara Zeisloft. Sat, Dec 21, 8pm; Sun, Dec 22, 5pm, \$15-30.

[upswingaerialdance.org](http://upswingaerialdance.org)

## Oakland Ballet Company

**Paramount Theatre, Oakland**

The spirit of the holidays is brought to life with Oakland Ballet's *The Nutcracker* presentation. Cheer on Marie and her soldiers as she rescues the *Nutcracker Prince* from the evil Rat King and then soar with dancing snowflakes to the Land of Sweets where luscious treats await. The Oakland Symphony along with the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir bring Tchaikovsky's magnificent score to life. Sat-Sun, Dec 21-22, 1pm and 5pm; Sun, Dec 22, 5pm, \$24-99.

[oaklandballet.org](http://oaklandballet.org)

## Smuin Contemporary Ballet Sunset Center, Carmel By the Sea

The Christmas Ballet features two acts with both classical ballet and festive contemporary numbers, including time-honored favorites and brand-new surprises set to holiday tunes and incorporating ballet, tap, jazz, and swing. Sat, Dec 28, 7:30pm; Sun, Dec 29, 2pm; Mon, Dec 30, 4pm, \$63-83.

[smuinballet.org](http://smuinballet.org)



# 10 Tips to Consider When Working with a Lighting Designer

by ALLEN WILLNER

**1 Communicating About Lighting for Dance**  
Lighting can be hard to communicate about since it's such an abstract element. A great way to communicate about your lighting design needs with a potential lighting designer is through photos, abstract images and descriptive words. Words like warm, cool, colorful, moody and stark are simple examples.

**2 Get money and time out of the way**  
Be upfront about budget, scale of production, timeline/dates and the amount of time you'd like the lighting designer to be in rehearsals with you. Lighting designers tend to be flexible and will usually try to work within your budget, but it's important to address the details early in the project rather than later. In the case that a designer is unable to work on the project they can also be a great resource for recommending other designers who might fit your project.

**3 A First Meeting**  
If you're working with a lighting designer for the first time, plan a phone or face to face meeting to talk about perspectives on light and to develop a language to communicate about light.

**4 The Whole Picture**  
Include your lighting designer in conversations regarding set, visual design and projections. All of these elements will have an effect on the lighting design, and the lighting designer will probably have helpful thoughts as related to lighting/time/venue etc.

**5 Plan for a Design Run**  
Set aside time for the lighting designer to view a run through of the work(s) they will be lighting. This is an important time for the designer to prepare their plot and cues for your show. Try to have as many elements present, represented for

the run. This can include sets/props, sound design, musicians, video and costumes (a sample of costumes is fine).

**6 Rehearsals and Sound Design**  
If you'd like your designer to come to rehearsals make sure that the sound design is accurate. It isn't really useful to have a lighting designer see a run with no audio if there is audio or with a different audio than the one you intend. Changes in sound design will likely impact/change the lighting designer's design and plan.

**7 TECH**  
In planning your technical rehearsals assume that the lighting designer will need to have time for the following (all of these will vary depending on venue and scale of show):

- lighting hang
- focus
- a pre-record of cues
- cueing

The Lighting Designer can help with scheduling how time is allotted and what time is needed for your show.

**8 Lighting Materials Budget**  
Plan a materials budget for lighting. This can range from \$100 for gels to upwards of a few thousand dollars for rented instruments. The lighting designer can also help with planning financial projections in advance.

**9 A Touring Package**  
Let your lighting designer know ahead of time if you have plans to tour the show. This will require a touring package which the designer can provide. A touring package usually comes with an added fee and would include the following:

- A lighting plot
- Cues
- A board recording of the lighting cues from the show.
- A tech rider of lighting requirements

**10 Let your Designer Design**  
Having a good idea about what you want in a lighting design or even details around specific cues is great, but you should also allow the lighting designer some space to create. If you're investing in a lighting design, it's a good idea to let them do what you hired them for. Be mindful that they aren't just a board operator or a technician.

**ALLEN WILLNER** is a lighting designer for Theater, Dance and Opera. He has lived and worked in San Francisco and New York as a Lighting Designer for 20 years. Locally he has designed for many Bay Area Dance companies including Erika Chong Shuch Performance Project, inkBoat, Garrett Moulton Productions, Deborah Slater Dance Theater, Katie Faulkner's Little Seismic Dance Company, Kristin Darrow and Company, ABD Productions, Moving Ground and Epifany Dance Theater. Regional designs include The Arizona Theater Company, The Guthrie Theater, The Chicago MOMA, REDCAT, The Cleveland Public Theater, 59E59th Street Theater, Playmakers Repertory Co, Brown University and The Philadelphia Theater Company. International designs include Dock 11, Potsdam Fabrique, Pfefferberg Berlin, Goyang Opera House, Seoul Korea, and Berkeley Street Theater, Toronto, ON. Awards and nominations include: San Francisco TBA Award Lighting Design Awards: We Player's *Beowulf*, Shotgun Players *Eurydice*, Theater of Yugen's *This Lingerin' Life*, SF Playhouse *The Obligation*. Bay Area Critics Circle Lighting Design Nominations for The Shotgun Players *Eurydice* and *God's Ear*, Broadway World Lighting and Set Design Nomination for Symmetry Theater's *Patience Worth*. Isadora Duncan Dance Awards for the lighting design of inkBoat's *Line Between*, Heaven's *Radio* and Deborah Slater Dance Theater's *Private Life*.

## 2019 Stage Lighting Tech Fellows

For several years Black Choreographers Festival, Dance Mission, and Afro Urban Society have been working to expand opportunities for womxn and people of color in stage production. The Stage Lighting Tech Fellowship emerged from this work. The two-month fellowship is committed to creating accessible, professional, and relevant skill sets for the fellows. They are mentored by Dance Mission Theater's Technical Director Harry Rubeck in introductory and intermediate basics of stage lighting. In its second year the number of participants doubled and the new cohort of fellows are:



**Tyler Musgrave** is a futurist and activist who believes that all that is beautiful in this world is illuminated.



**Saoirse Weaver** is a 23 year old from San Francisco with a background in Art and Design. In her spare time she likes to read & make jewelry.



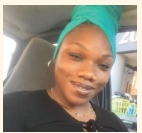
**Tracy Baxter** is an Oakland-based writer who will sing, dance, or act at the drop of a hat. She's performed with Theater of Others and Ninjaz of Drama in San Francisco. A new playwright whose very first work, KUDZU 2012, was a 2016 Bay Area Playwrights Foundation festival semi-finalist, she's now exploring the worlds of stage directing and lighting design.



Oakland based drummer, dancer and performance artist. **Niki Brown** loves to explore rhythm through many avenues of creativity and exploration.



**Shaunnah Ray** is an Oakland native who is committed to applying her passion for the performing arts and expression to perpetuate activism in her communities. As a means to nurture her own creative outlets Shaunnah has found and is pursuing a growing interest in lighting design, a craft that she has been exploring at EastSide Cultural Center through EastSide's Live Arts and Resistance Theater programming.



**Kimberly Harvey-Scott's** passion for eclectic dance began at age eight. Her career started and excelled with Diamano Coura West African Dance Company in 2006. With this, she has been able to spread her message and volunteers her time and talent to Berkeley High students since 2008, as Stage Manager, counselor, and teaching movement and choreography.



**Tanika Baptiste** is a producer, actor, vocalist and entrepreneur. "The stage is my happy place."



**Destiny Evans** is a black, non-binary androgynous, femme. Their work is rooted in telling the stories and prioritizing the work/healing of queer and trans black folks.



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Discovering the Power and Ability to Take Action

» Continued from pg 5

*happened to me and I am forever in debt to Megan's bravery. It takes a special kind of person to put someone else's safety above your own, and that is what she did for my boyfriend and me.*

This event took some extreme teamwork between my partner, roommate, and me. I attribute having healthy active bodies as a primary reason we were able to make it through this horrific moment without more damage and to help shield those in need from further harm. A deep dance practice centered in contact improvisation and site-specific work has provided me with this potential to take action. And as I continue to heal physically, financially, and emotionally, the process of creating dance with people I love has helped me work through some of this trauma and take steps forward.

In January 2019, I embarked on a dance project with two of my closest friends/colaborators (and phenomenal movers), Shira Yaziv and Sonsherée Giles, which we presented in August 2019. At first, I tried to avoid acknowledging what had happened. I wanted to just focus on making an energetic and virtuosic site-specific dance for Athletic Playground, that artfully activated ladders, planks, bars, mats, blocks, lofts, and walls, and that centered contact improvisation and dynamic partnering. It helped to draw my attention to something productive and positive. But at some point, I realized this incident was informing everything I was doing and that it was impossible to ignore. I was processing this traumatic event through the creation of this dance with two of the people I trust most. Why hide it? But also, how would I share this story without overwhelming viewers? What hopeful aspects could I highlight? How was everyone able to come out alive on the other side? How could this inspire people to move and act? I did not want to focus on narrative or reenactment, though there was one specific investigation we explored.

**The Ability to Take Action:** I put myself on the side of a large block (24"W x 48"L x 36"H) with the firm goal of pushing it to one side of the room, and asked Shira and Sonsherée to be on the other side of that block, trying to push it to the opposite side of the room. It was similar to the action of having to hold a floating door between my home and the attacker months before, except this time with a counterbalance of trust instead of violence. Rather than feelings of being disempowered and afraid, I was able to recognize the strength and bravery it took to protect myself, my loved ones, and the lives of others. It was an act of heroism. This theme became a driving exploration in the creation of *Action Potential*, where we channelled our inner superheroes—climbing, lifting, assisting, jumping, and flying in celebration of movement, trust, strength, resilience, and the power to take action.

MEGAN LOWE is a dancer, performer, choreographer, singer, teacher, and administrator in the San Francisco Bay Area. She creates dance works with an affinity for dynamic/kinetic movement, site-specificity/space-interaction, and contact improvisation/partnering. Megan has performed with Flyaway Productions, Scott Wells & Dancers, Lenora Lee Dance, Lizz Roman & Dancers, Epiphany Productions, Dance Brigade, and more. She is a Teaching/Choreographing Artist for Joe Goode Performance Group, Bandaloop, and Flyaway, teaches semesterly masterclasses at UC Berkeley, and has taught contact improvisation for wccijAM, ODC, Finnish Hall, InterKinected, Shawl-Anderson Dance Center, and Athletic Playground. Megan would like to thank Rosemary Hannon and Stephanie Sherman for their generous feedback in the writing of this article. [mlowedances.wixsite.com/meganlowe](http://mlowedances.wixsite.com/meganlowe)

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[odc.dance/velveteen](http://odc.dance/velveteen)

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# IN MEMORIAM: Frank Shawl

by SIMA BELMAR

Is that all there is, is that all there is  
If that's all there is my friends,  
then let's keep dancing  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball  
If that's all there is  
—PEGGY LEE/JERRY LIEBER/MIKE STOLLER

Frank Shawl, co-founder with Victor Anderson (1928-1917) of Shawl-Anderson Dance Center, died at home, the evening of October 4, 2019. A dear friend of his and mine, Ann DiFruscia, and devoted caregiver Evelyn Johnson were by his side. I had visited Frank that morning. My husband Antonio and I found him spectral in his bed, mouth agape, eyes at half-mast, his cat Booboo nearby, trees visible through his window, a pile of stuffed camels on a chair. Frank's apartment was wall-to-wall camels: camel statues, camel paintings, camel drawings, camel engravings.

We told him we loved him and said good-bye, then sat a while in his living room with Rebecca Johnson (SADC Executive Director) and Abigail Hosein (SADC Administrative Director). Rebecca told us that Frank's last words to SADC Board President Steve Siegelman were, "You have such nice teeth." Abigail told the story of Frank's encounter with a camel in Egypt. When the camel took off running with Frank on board, he said it was the most exhilarating feeling. And when the camel handler started to admonish the camel, Frank said something like, "Don't you hurt this camel! He is perfect!" Before we left, I went into Frank's room one more time. I stroked his forehead and told him that I believe that our spirits pre- and post-date our bodily incarnations, so his spirit will be here once his body says farewell.

The last time Frank spoke to me was about three weeks before he died. I walked into his bedroom, he opened his eyes and said, "Simeleh." Frank often called me by this Yiddish diminutive. We used lots of Yiddish words together: That performance was dreck! What a pain in the tuchus! I'm gonna plotz! Frank, though New Jersey born and raised, was a New Yorker through and through. We like to tawk in New Yawk accents together. Brooklyn and Joisey, togethah forevah.

*How ya doin', Frank?  
I'm doin'.*

His caregiver brought him water. He took a sip and said, "I don't like it." I played him one of the Peggy Lee songs he used for the solo he made me in 2002. He named it "A Life" because it traced the development of a woman from child through adolescence into the twilight years. He had me dance with a ragdoll. He coached me to perform with chutzpah, extra schmaltz on the side. I thought the piece was a bit over the top, snotty postmodernist that I was at the time.

But Frank was a showman, through and through. Over the years, whenever I'd find Frank and Victor standing together behind the desk, Victor would smile humbly and Frank would grin broadly, Victor stalwart, Frank shimmying. Stalwart and Shimmy—that about sums up the unlikely pair that built the house of dance so many of us in the Bay Area call home.

At the end of the song ("Is that all there is?"), I thought he had fallen asleep but then, he opened his eyes and said, "I love that." Before I left his room, *Jeopardy!* flickering mutely on the TV, Frank said, "It's important that we..." He didn't finish his thought but in my mind it was complete. The most important thing is "we," not I, not you. Frank and Victor created a space of we at Shawl-Anderson. They always say, a community that trains together, stays together. I know—nobody says that, but that doesn't make it less true.

Several years ago, Frank quietly stopped coming to the studio. I saw him infrequently—at his apartment in Oakland for his birthday parties every December 27, an occasional sighting at a show or open rehearsal. My image of him as a little lost, foggy, frail, and sedentary had temporarily eclipsed my memory of him in his full vitality. But two days after he died, I went to dance church as I always do on Sunday mornings—Randee Paufve's 10am advanced modern class—and

Randee talked about how Frank would come upstairs to look in on class every time she taught. She could recognize his footsteps on the stairs. I had forgotten about that. He did the same when I taught class, his erect and open figure occupying the doorway, an ear-to-ear smile, a couple of moves to the music, then gone.

During our last conversation, I asked him, "Frank, what's with all the camels?" He looked at me for a little while then whispered, "I love them." This is quintessential Frank—there's nothing to analyze here, just love. This is how he related to me and, it seems, to nearly everyone whose life he touched: with love, just because we.



Photos courtesy of Shawl-Anderson (clockwise from top): Frank Shawl and Victor Anderson, Frank teaching class, Frank demonstrating movement in the studio

I want to thank the people who took care of Frank these last years. These people made it possible for him to live and die in his beloved apartment in Oakland surrounded by love. He was an easy guy to love but caretaking is never

easy, and it almost always goes unrecognized. Thank you, Frank's Angels, Ann DiFruscia, Nancy Fishman, Nina Haft, and Rebecca Johnson; original caregiver manager, Brian Smith; caregiver manager and caregiver, Cheryl Griffin; and the caregiver team, Carla Charles, Gwendolyn Gaston, Evelyn Johnson, William Lancelot Macias, and Andrea Strauss.

When going through Frank's papers, Ann DiFruscia found a letter I wrote to Frank before I moved from California to Rome. I wrote the letter under the assumption that I would not be moving back to the States—ever. I came back in 2008, just in time to celebrate SADC's 50th anniversary. I'm grateful I sent Frank that letter. It means he knew how much he meant to me. I share it with you here.

11 July 2004

Dear Frank,

*I'm in the back seat of the blue Honda Civic that belongs to Randee's friend Johnny. Randee is driving and Stephanie [Miller], who dances the duet with Rebecca [Johnson] in Cleave, is in the passenger seat. Riding shotgun, as they say.*

*You and I forgot to say good-bye. We forgot that you were going to New York and that you wouldn't be returning until I was gone. (Our planes may pass each other in the sky—I'll choose a moment to wave to you.)*

*I don't have a pretty or appropriately humorous card for you. Only this plain steno notebook. We are driving back to the Bay Area from Portland where we performed—well, I think.*

*You and I are no-frills, New York-New Jersey types, so we don't need Hallmark help. I can write on a plain pad, on a bumpy road, and you will understand me.*

*I love you, Frank. You mean the world to me. You and your studio made my life in California rich, warm, artful, full. Your studio is a reflection of your spirit—inviting and charismatic. I believe in multiple soulmates. You are one of mine.*

*Thanks to the universe, to the delicate mystical machine that gave us those two tearful, joyful lunches at Grasshopper and Naan N Curry. Crying and laughing over two orders of short ribs. We've had many moments over the years, but those last two lunches held us and our shared*

*spirit, and I hold them close to my grieving heart.*

*Thank you for sharing your life with me, your dancing, and your thoughts, your honesty around loss. Thank you for making "A Life" for me, with me. You saw my ragdoll spirit and gave it breath.*

*Spirit. The word that recurs, that repeats. We, as dancers, know the value of repetition, as an artistic device and as an avenue for learning. So, I repeat, your spirit is a soaring eagle, a weeping dandelion, a mighty oak, a mightier redwood, a delicious bowl of pasta.*

*Let's share a bowl in Rome.*

*I will miss you with every cell.*

Love, Sima

That's all there is. So let's keep dancing.

You can find Frank's official obituary on the SADC website. You can experience his jubilant legacy at Shawl-Anderson Dance Center in Berkeley. And you can support future generations of dancers by donating to the Frank Shawl Legacy Fund. [shawl-anderson.org/support](http://shawl-anderson.org/support)



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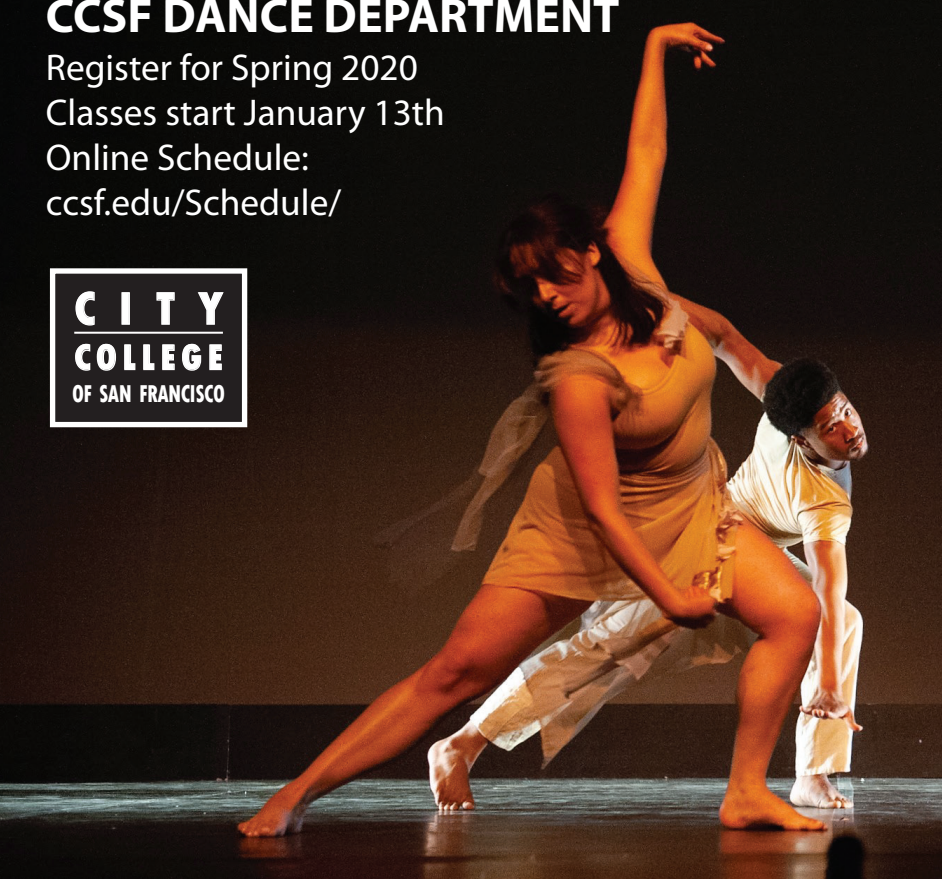
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# IN PRACTICE: A Dancer Poet Creature Conversation with Denise Leto

by SIMA BELMAR AND DENISE LETO

ON JULY 4 OF THIS YEAR, I launched *The Villanelle Project*. Well, launch is a strong word since all I did was announce in my tinyletter that I wanted to launch *The Villanelle Project*. A villanelle is a late 16th century French poetic form comprised of 19 lines, five stanzas of three lines each and a final stanza of four lines. What makes it feel like a choreographic score is the way repetition works in the form: line 1 repeats in lines 6, 12, and 18, and line 3 repeats in lines 9, 15, and 19. The form nudged me to come up with the plan to invite 19 artists, a mix of choreographers and poets, to create villanelles and solo dances that adhere to the villanelle structure.

The first person to respond to my call was Denise Leto. Denise is a poet who has worked with choreographers and dancers. We met in Iowa at the 2014 Society for Dance History Scholars conference where she was presenting with choreographer Cid Pearlman. They discussed the work *Your Body is Not a Shark*, which is both a dance theater performance (in collaboration with cellist Joan Jeanrenaud) and a book of poetry. They also handed out swag. (I scored a t-shirt.) Denise and I met again at Mary Armentrout’s 2018 summer Feldenkrais composition workshop where we made what I call *The Shushing*, a trio with interdisciplinary poet and teaching artist Amber DiPietra in which we sat like a group of hypersensitive bunnies and shushed every sound we heard in the room. (You probably had to be there, so you’ll have to take my word for it when I say it was profound.) The workshop was not about disability poetics but it was bathed in it—Denise, Amber, and several other workshop participants identified as disabled artists, and I was there in the middle of radiation treatment. We spent as much time napping in community as we did making work and it was more fun than summer camp.

When Denise said she was interested in *The Villanelle Project*, I was ecstatic. I didn’t even worry too much about my paltry poetry knowledge and experience. I asked her to read my poetry. She was very kind with her feedback. (We agreed that it is good to have the word “meatball” in a poem but the jury is out on “sweet.”) She wrote a villanelle. And for the past few months, we have been meeting for semi-monthly lunches at Café Leila in Berkeley to talk about poetry and dance.

What follows is Denise’s poetic distillation of one of our conversations. The transcript of the conversation is over 7000 words long. I transcribed our words. Denise transformed them. This piece is truly a collaboration—we are its co-writers. Denise’s first draft villanelle follows the distillation.

D: Dancers brought the musicians physically—

S: Into the dance space—

D: What was the language—

S: Singing—

S: It was like a choir—

D: What made those two expressions work—

D: Well, three—

Accidents of juxtaposition.

Levels of it: there’s a stillness with the movement.

(This wordless reach to what is not beautiful.)

(Resorting to what is beautiful, what is known.)

*Then if you start to add text. What do movement phrases mean? What you’re saying about the physicality of a poem. Because I haven’t connected any of this, watching you, this is embodied. The articulation of language and movement can get so. Like the dancers are props to the words and the words are props to the dancers. The dance class. The poet’s workshop. To whomever is participating or watching. Within the body of a dancer where is the poet’s body? What are the words doing? The dancer is the art in the words. Or. Let’s say from the start there is no language. None. No movement. No movement score. That being the starting point.*

D: How do you take that—

S: In the room—

D: You see what I mean, no—

S: Making it together with no—

D: A different kind of collaboration—

S: And with the Villanelle—

D: It would be—

In the word/gesture pair: a rearrangement of error.

Sound is sometimes first then the meaning hues into it.

(It wasn’t stillness. It was curiosity.) (Embodiment, deeply about the embodiment.)

*This is what interests me. The emergence of touching layers. Not written “for” or “about” but with. Would I have felt so strongly about those moments had they not been offset by the moments that felt like so many others? An unconscious form first. Not separate or together. When the room, the negative space isn’t filled with words. When the quiet helps to empty choreography. Or to feel, for example, the villanelle structure in the dance. That third thing. I am a poet. You are a dancer. Let’s play.*

D: It’s a question of verbs too—

S: And in that way again—

D: I don’t have any. Where are they—

S: Make—

D: Constellate—

S: If we’re coming together, if we’re experiencing a poem—

**This is what interests me. The emergence of touching layers.**

And a dance, it’s not about fidelity or legibility—

D: So how to dance the lines, “what lax star and loss of meaning”—

S: “Sweet fathom in a formless sea”—

D: Or write to the body moving with the line—

D: If we didn’t see it that way—

Somehow being able to recognize. I’m inside something that I don’t understand.

(I’m happy to be there because it’s movement.)

(Fathom is a measurement too.)

*What does it mean to have something follow something that doesn’t. So in the choreography that would be my question. How to make. What’s cliché about sweet for a dancer? To figure out if normatively we go like this and then this: sweet justice, sweet tea, sweetheart, but sweet fathom? I don’t know. I love that it’s sort of that mixture of things. In the villanelle the word “sweet” gets repeated many times but in another form maybe once. How many times in a row do we want. Or how could a dancer dance a star then fall. Not like that. That wouldn’t. More like what does “lax” in the mouth feel like and where could that be in the body. To get all involved and really wonder.*

S: If you can see the repeated line—

D: A reaction against and an action toward—

D: To spend hours deciding between two words—

S: Attention to movement choices that—

D: I have no idea why this one moment—

S: To constantly question— Enter the words as they are read. She made me see the spaces in between. (Less afraid to have everything make less sense.) (The many aspects of a conversation unmade.)

But now, the dancers are walking around with the sheet music. Now they are singing and it was so amazing. I don’t know how to describe it. How am I expressing the sound of these words and what is my body doing? The problem of description. Translation. Because it’s a habitual pattern, doesn’t mean it can’t be there. It’s just: why? How can you get the movement to do something else? What else is going on in the question? How do you fill that space? How do you arrive at ambiguity? As opposed to creating a word to the movement or a movement to the word? Not another forceful breath but attunement.

S: Toward the end I started to think maybe—

S: She’s saying something other than I thought she—

D: And what’s the more—

D: Dangerous thing to do with it—

• • • • •

(Denise’s Villanelle One, work in progress)

Sad in a balm of sea  
Eros, angles, feral fate  
Sweet fathom in a formless sea

Her sanctum lush and catastrophe  
Then, after she’s not older, we wait  
Sad in a balm of sea

It hurt, she said, it hurt simply  
How light itself could striate  
Sweet fathom in a formless sea

So many phantoms visibly  
Make shoreless, fallow feet  
Sad in a balm of sea

Dream me still and cast me  
With her: skinless and constellate  
Sweet fathom in a formless sea

What lax star and loss of meaning  
Except how hourless days  
Become sad in a balm of sea  
And soon are almost seen

SIMA BELMAR, Ph.D., is a Lecturer in the Department of Theater, Dance, & Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her writing has appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *The Oakland Tribune*, *Dance Magazine*, *TDR*, *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, *Performance Matters*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Screenance Studies*. To keep up with Sima’s writing please subscribe to [tinyletter.com/simabelmar](mailto:tinyletter.com/simabelmar)

DENISE LETO is a transdisciplinary poet, writer, editor and experimental dance dramaturge. Recently she collaborated on the dance "Bluets #1-40" at the University of Santa Cruz. She wrote the multi-genre collaborative dance performance, *Your Body is Not a Shark*, centering on feminist disability poetics. Her current project involves an ecopoetic exploration of the San Francisco Bay through site-writing and movement practice. Denise is a former member of Olimpias, an international disability performance and poetry collective. Poems are forthcoming in *Rogue Agent* and *Quarterly West*. [onecontinuousword@wordpress.com](mailto:onecontinuousword@wordpress.com)

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