



indance

NOV 2019

DISCOURSE & DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN, & AMPLIFY

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Nadhi Thekkek**, Nov 8
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Welcome

by **WAYNE HAZZARD, ARTIST ADMINISTRATOR**

Traveling provides an opportunity to refresh, reflect and reframe.

The refreshing part of a journey starts once I'm in my preferred mode of transport—a bike, a car, a bus, a plane, and rarely a boat because I get seasick.

Travel that refreshes can also transpire when dreaming and meditating. During dreams my only mode of transport is of course my mind, and I can recall numerous exotic journeys. There's the swimming dreams where I am in the deepest part of the ocean gliding in and out of caves, and these caves are filled with treasure. Another dream finds me flying amongst the stars—this is a recurring dream in which I am Captain Marvel. Yes, I want to be a superhero.

My meditations are often busier than I hope. And I try and not judge this lack of focus. Even if I am 'judgy' during meditating can I accept the gifts received during those special moments of interior and contemplative travel? Yes, please.

Before each trip I have the habit of rushing to accomplish tasks that must be moved forward while I'm away. Pay bills, complete reports, reschedule meetings, and usually the final task is to forget to set an 'I'm away' auto email.

Packing is always left to the last minute, because the more time I have to pack the more I pack. And still I am an over-packer. I try, unsuccessfully, to not judge that I will stuff multiple pairs of shoes and socks

into my suitcase. Peek inside my packed bag and you will find more shirts than days I am away. Invariably I return from a weekend trip, or month long journey, with items I did not wear. Ok, I admit I like this about myself—at 62 I'm not gonna go all Marie Kondo (only keeping things that "spark joy").

Once a journey begins reflections start. I think about what got me to the place of being on this journey. Reflecting also opens space to deepen my commitment to objectives: get more rest, listen more and accept the past as done; remember that judgment only limits my intentions, not knowing will reveal something and some things can't be known. Trust.

Reframing can take place anytime—often at the end of a sojourn—and it is in this gift that I can keep on giving. Cliché and true. For example; writing these monthly welcomes allow me to travel in and around the metaphors of how, when, why and where we create. Therefore, I can reframe and state that participating in a performance is another form of wondrous travel.

An audience, myself included, is eager to experience new territory, often a place yet known. Let us be eager to delight in the discovery of the land-of-dance—fiction and nonfiction— and when we don't judge where the artist has decided to take us what a glorious time and journey it is.

A closing tid-bit: reading is traveling through words. Enjoy the excursion set forth and within.

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Dialogues in the Diaspora

by NADHI THEKKEK



Photo by Anubhava



Photo by Anubhava



Photo by Leo Resplandor

AS A DANCEMAKER, my chosen form of expression is bharatanatyam, a traditional dance form of South India. Like many traditional art forms, bharatanatyam feels precious, like something that has traveled through time and space but at the same it's very much alive and changing. There is so much of bharatanatyam that digs deep, that connects the artist and the observer on a personal level. But, as a choreographer, how do I negotiate the boundaries of bharatanatyam to create work that 1) embodies the art form I believe in and 2) reflects my experience as a first generation, American-born, Malayalee, woman?

I was born in the US, my first language was English, and I was raised Catholic. Bharatanatyam is an art form from India, danced to Indian languages I couldn't understand, and draws inspiration from the gods and goddesses of Hindu mythology. Technically, there is very little about bharatanatyam that is supposed to feel familiar to me. But despite my lack of familiarity, bharatanatyam connected me to characters in Hindu mythology and made them relatable. It explored the human emotions that I saw every day and found them in mythological stories and ancient poetry. Through these experiences, I've seen that bharatanatyam has the kind of power that makes what seems foreign actually seem familiar, and this is one of the primary reasons I believe

bharatanatyam can be used to bridge the cultural differences in our communities.

Bharatanatyam is becoming increasingly prevalent in the diaspora, with teachers all over the Bay Area. But perhaps because of how tradition can be misperceived as rigid or dated, it's largely losing relevance in today's youth, where creativity and thinking outside the box is encouraged. At the same time, it feels like who we are as South Asians in the diaspora is changing. In this era, we are being discriminated against because of our skin color, because of our religion, or because of our legal status, and as a community we are responding to those injustices. If our art forms are supposed to reflect who we are, then they need to embody our activism. What if it's not mythology, but history that moves us? What if it's not a story at all, but an emotion or reaction to what is going on in the world? Could we use bharatanatyam to explore these perspectives, or do we need to redraw the boundaries?

In *Broken Seeds Still Grow* (2017), co-creators Rupy C. Tut and I explored communal violence and divisions in secular communities during the 1947 Partition of British India through visual art and dance. In the choreography, I retained the bharatanatyam vocabulary, expressive mime, and set the dance largely to classical Indian music (composed by GS Rajan). I sidestepped some conventions by deconstructing movement, experimenting with

improvisation, and adding a western instrument and music (by cellist Chris Evans.)

But I believe the two biggest deviations from bharatanatyam were 1) taking on a political theme based on true eyewitness accounts and 2) partnering with an Indian miniature painter to tell the story. As a result of our partnership, Rupy and I created a layered narrative that reminded people of their own stories of displacement, regardless of background, while we reimagined what was possible with both our traditional forms.

Earlier this year I premiered *Unfiltered* with co-creators Sahasra Sambamoorthi (NYC) and Rasika Kumar (San Jose.) Here we again deviated from convention by taking the experiences of women we knew personally to explore the #metoo movement through bharatanatyam. Rasika's perspective delved into the power dynamic at work, Sahasra's perspective explored relationship abuse, and mine examined the complicated emotions of date rape. Because we created depictions that weren't normally seen in bharatanatyam, all of us had to reinterpret our use of hand gestures and facial expressions to describe scenarios that aren't usually depicted. Think computers, cell phones, trains, and drinks at a bar.

We also deviated by using English words to create rhythmic syllables (or jethis) to

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From Vision to Mainstay in a Decade: San Francisco Dance Film Festival

by **HEATHER DESAULNIERS**

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT FALL? It's by far my favorite time of year, so my list is on the longer side. There are the beloved seasonal traditions - Thanksgiving feasts and spooky Halloween trick or treating (my dog's pizza costume last year was epic). Crisp autumn temperatures, though admittedly those are less common in Northern California. I can even fess up to my pumpkin spice latte devotion, no matter how uncool or uncouth. But above all, I love how fall seems a moment to mark milestones. Trees renew by shedding colorful leaves. Folks return rested and rejuvenated (hopefully) from vacation ready to dive into new projects. School begins once again, and a multitude of activities resume after summer break. When everything starts back up, there is an undeniable sense of forward motion, of passage into the next chapter.

Fall dance in the San Francisco Bay Area has always been full of this milestone spirit, and this year is no exception. In September, Shawl-Anderson Dance Center launched the new *Queering Dance Festival* while Epiphany Dance Theater's *Trolley Dances* just marked its sixteenth iteration a few weeks back. Late fall will see the seventy-fifth anniversary of San Francisco Ballet's *Nutcracker* and the thirty-third year of ODC/Dance's *The Velveteen Rabbit*. And as we say farewell to October and greet November another significant milestone unfolds: the 10th annual San Francisco Dance Film Festival (SFDF). From November 2nd to the 10th, the festival will take over the city's major screening venues with an eclectic array of short films, full-length features and gripping documentaries from all over the world. The vibe will be one of celebration and accomplishment, certainly for the films and filmmakers, but also for SFDF itself, which in a single decade has become a mainstay in the dance community.

When SFDF officially launched in 2010, it brought to fruition an idea that had been on founder Greta Schoenberg's heart and mind for some time. While dancing professionally in Europe in the mid-1990s, the Santa Cruz native had had many opportunities to witness dance/choreographic artists incorporating film, video and multi-media elements into their work. The innovation and risk-taking indeed impressed her, but she also started to realize that the intersection of film and dance could address yet another challenging obstacle. "I was frustrated with the reality that permission was needed from the powers that be to create something, as well as large budgetary resources," Schoenberg explains. "It was exciting that I could make short dance films that wouldn't require as much rehearsal space, I didn't have to pay for a theater nor get a green light from anyone - it felt like a more democratic and egalitarian approach to artmaking." After returning to the Bay and settling in SF, this attraction to dance and film only grew stronger, and in 2009 Schoenberg cobbled together a collection of films along with dance photography by her husband Gregg Schoenberg and the late Weiferd Watts for an event at a friend's art gallery: "It was extremely DIY, and I had no idea whether anyone would come, but a bunch of people showed up - the idea had sparked, and from there, we were invited to do a more formal showing at the Ninth Street Independent Film Center." Schoenberg was on board, and in March 2010 the San Francisco Dance Film Festival debuted to local audiences. "That first festival was still very grass roots; we had fewer films, it was shorts-driven, mostly local work, and we had a limited budget for marketing and publicity," remembers Schoenberg. "And yet there was so much excitement about what this could be - Dancers' Group reached out with an unsolicited grant to get us going; this early vote of confidence from an organization that works so hard bringing our community together was incredibly valuable."

SFDF has experienced much growth and change since their inaugural event in 2010. The duration of each festival has gradually increased over time, moving from a single weekend to the upcoming edition's nine days. Similarly, the number of venues has expanded, with screenings this year happening at five unique spaces: Brava Theater Center, Catharine Clark Gallery, Delancey St. Screening Room, Lucasfilm Premier Theater, and the Roxie Cinema. Variety of submissions has ballooned and multiplied, as has the scope of international entries - 2019's program includes films from Taiwan, South Korea, Chile, Iran, Slovenia, and more. But perhaps one of the most notable changes has been in the festival's leadership structure. In its first few years, SFDF joyfully welcomed some heavy hitters to its family - Judy Flannery as Executive Director and Randall Heath as Managing Director - two people whom Schoenberg credit with putting the organization on artistic steroids and setting it on an incredible, advancing course: "SFDF feels very healthy, with a great working environment, helmed by these professional, talented individuals who constantly surprise me with their skill and ideas." At the same time, Schoenberg herself transitioned into a different position and became SFDF's Director of Programming. While Director of Programming still encompasses a host of wide-ranging responsibilities, she was excited that this new role allowed her to focus more on her passions, like film curation (in collaboration with Heath and a screening committee) and building relationships with filmmakers. "Letting go of something that you are the founder of can be tough, especially at first," she relays, "but I was glad to have the foresight to step sideways and see what other expertise could bring to the table."

But much has also stayed the same these past ten years. First and foremost is SFDF's commitment to Schoenberg's original vision - championing independent artists and creating a platform for their work to be seen. And, of course, the overwhelming positive response! From the first pre-event to present day, viewers have been all in for this experience. Having said that, Schoenberg is quick to acknowledge that building an audience base has been a challenge from the very beginning, one she hopes can change as SFDF enters its next decade: "It is still a battle to get people to come to the theater for the festival; once they do, they're on board and hooked."

It's safe to say that attendees of the 2019 festival will for sure be hooked - such a remarkable line-up awaits! A trio of British premieres are surely not-to-be-missed. SFDF's opening night selection is the North American premiere of *Queen + Béjart: Ballet For Life*, directed by Lynne Wake, which chronicles a collaborative project linking Queen's music and Maurice Béjart's choreography. Equal parts emotional stunner and sensory banquet, connection leaps from the documentary's every moment - the connection across time, across disciplines, between iconic artists and the deep losses from AIDS. The US premiere of *Romeo & Juliet*, from Ballet Boyz founders Michael Nunn and William Trevitt, screens on Wednesday night. With Sir Kenneth MacMillan's choreography and titular performances by William Bracewell and Francesca Hayward, this new adaptation relives the timeless saga that intertwines the transcendent power of love and the ugly power of hate. SFDF is also honored to present the world premiere of *Betroffenheit's* filmed version, directed by Jeff Tudor, written by Jonathon Young and choreographed by Crystal Pite. Recently onstage at Cal Performances, the potent mixed discipline work follows Young's real-life journey through personal tragedy, grief, escape and

eventually, hope.

Alongside these phenomenal entries, Schoenberg is looking forward to so many other moments of the festival. Two different films, *Dancing on Icebergs* from New Zealand and *Fram* from Finland, seek to unite dance and choreography together with the urgency of climate change. In keeping a pulse on current technology, Adobe engineer Bhautik Joshi and Capacitor's Artistic Director Jodi Lomask take a sojourn into virtual reality, as part of SFDF's yearly Co-Laboratory Program. Marvel at how the brain looks and functions as Lomask's brain is mapped during the choreographic process in *Into the Neural Forest*. Or if short films are more your speed, there are plenty of offerings peppered throughout SFDF's nine days. "Shorts are still my favorite, and this year, we have a number of shorts programs, some of which are designed around a distinct theme," shares Schoenberg. "*Finding Me* investigates the discovery of identity through dance; *Women on the Move* features all female filmmakers; and *Raising Voices* highlights social justice."

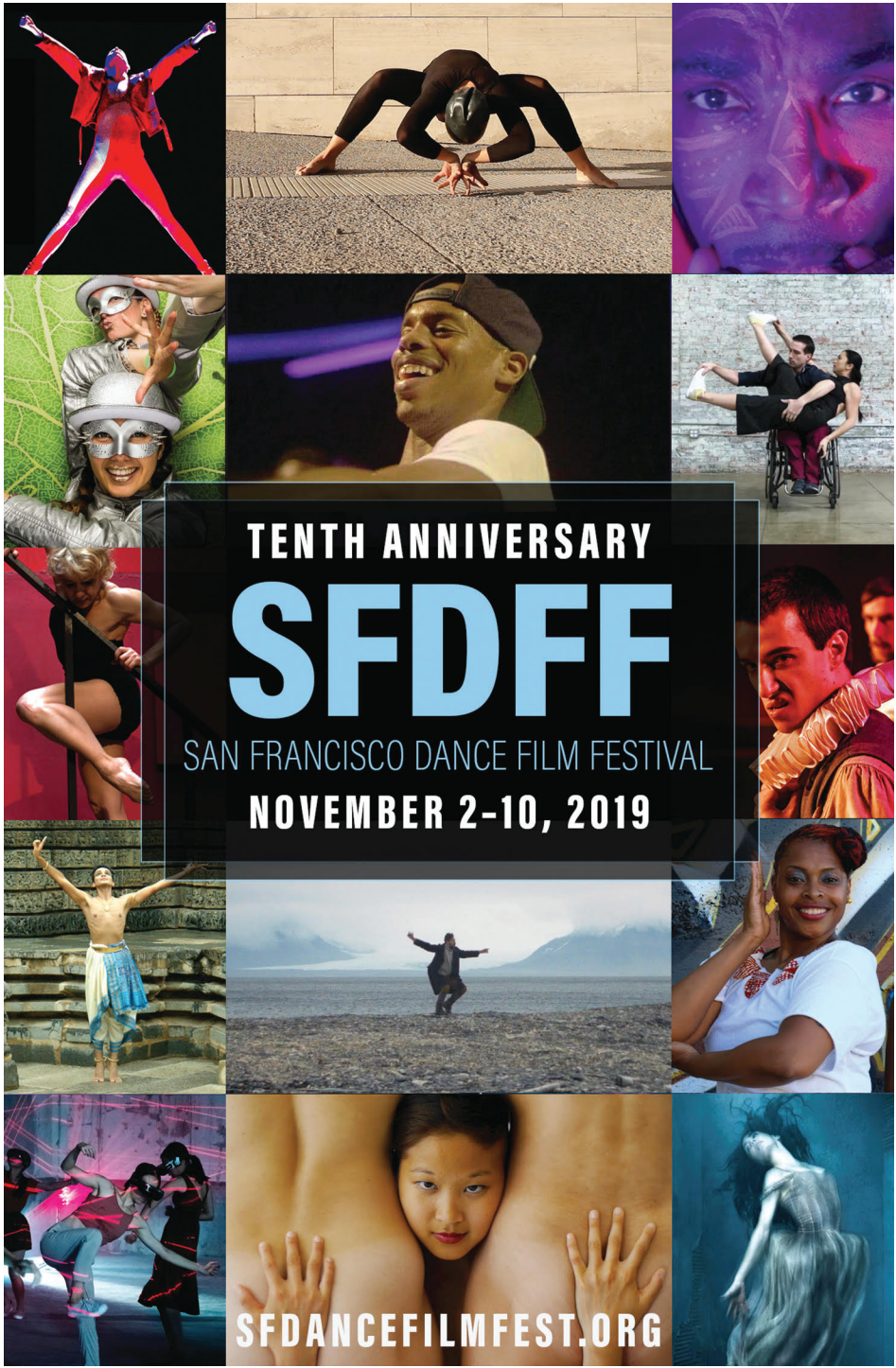
Schoenberg is beyond thrilled that so many filmmakers, directors and participants are planning to be at the festival in person, especially Charles "Lil' Buck" Riley, the first recipient of SFDF's brand new Embodiment Award for artistic excellence and influence. "I'm quite star struck, to be honest - Lil' Buck is an international dance force and presence, a ground-breaking collaborator famous for a flowing form of street dance known as Memphis jookin," says Schoenberg. "An inspirational artist who sees the potential art has for change, he has done so much for dance, film and social justice." In addition to the Embodiment Award, Lil'

Buck's artistic contributions will be celebrated with an evening of film featuring the San Francisco premiere of *Lil' Buck: Real Swan*, directed by Louis Wallecan.

With the festival a mere weeks away, the focus is understandably on the here and now - details, logistics, problem-solving and the invariable last minute issues that arise with such a massive endeavor. Though that doesn't stop the SFDF staff and board from thinking about the next ten years, and the ten years after that. Securing more funding. Developing a larger audience. No question. And for Schoenberg, that future also includes broad and expansive ideas: "I want to make the most of our current trajectory; to create collaborative and educational programs; to continue giving voice to the underrepresented; to showcase the plethora of ideas from our community; and to celebrate and support even more artists in getting their work seen." Lofty aspirations? Indeed. But remember, it was vision like this that first built the San Francisco Dance Film Festival, and turned it into a permanent fixture on the fall dance calendar. Sure seems like an organization that is all about getting things done.

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San Francisco Dance Film Festival runs November 2-10. Times, venues and screenings vary, please visit sfdancefilmfest.org.



IN PRACTICE: Nina Haft & Company's *Precarious Pod*

by SIMA BELMAR

WHEN I WAS DANCING with Nina Haft in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Jewish themes were prevalent. She made a dance called *Minyan* that derived some of its choreography from davening, the full body gesture of Jewish liturgical prayer, and another called *Mit a Bing! Mit a Boom! A Klezmer Dance*. In that one, I played David Berman, the Jewish gangster (or “gambling pioneer” if you prefer). I loved working with Nina in part because she’s a deep dance nerd who loves researching both book and body archives.

Recently, Haft has turned her choreographic attention toward the question of what it means to be human in relation to the natural world. *Precarious Pod* is an immersive and interactive dance event that investigates what animals have to teach humans about instinct, sustainability, and survival. The choreography and improvisational structures were developed in relation to three different animals on different points on the extinction spectrum: crows, wolves, and the vaquita, a harbor porpoise. Haft’s research has been extensive: she’s read books (*A Foray into the World of Animals and Humans* by Jakob von Uexkull, *Staying with the Trouble* by Donna Haraway, *Trace* by Lauret Savoy, *Becoming a Beast* by Charles Foster and *The Genius of Birds* by Jennifer Ackerman); followed the work of wildlife ecologists and animal behaviorists studying the impact of reintroducing wolves into Yellowstone National Park; and attended the annual conference of the Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography where she led workshops with scientists as an artist working on water and climate change.

At a showing of the wolves section, which features dancers Rose Huey, Rogelio Lopez, Andrew Merrell, and Rebecca Morris, Haft explained that the dancers were “not meant to look like anything other than human beings, but rather to explore what it’s like to inhabit the point of view of another species.” She asked us—an audience of three that included set designer Lauren Elder—what was coming across, what we connected with and wondered about, what we were confused about, and when we felt disengaged. The following conversation took place after the showing, when Haft was still thinking about how the work would unfold in performance.

Sima Belmar: Watching the quartet, I felt like there were three movement evocations at play: wolf movement, human movement, and contemporary dancer movement. I like to think of dancer as a particular category of human because of the way we consciously cultivate our senses, our instincts, and our muscle memory. I saw the dancers practice sensing across space. They practiced staring. They piled up in a pack cuddle. Backs of heads reacted to sudden movements taking place behind them. Faces sniffed the air. Foreheads smeared across collar bones. There seemed to be heightened attention paid to the way finger, palm, and foot pads make contact with the floor, the air, and other creatures in the space. All of this both heightened and defamiliarized the contemporary dance movement at work in the piece, in an almost disidentifying move.

Nina Haft: I’ve been doing a lot with exploring how improvisational structures might be a way to understand instinct. Things that are choreographed, those more defined patterns, even though it gets in our muscle memory, it’s more from the outside in, so it’s conditioned by the environment. If you put wolves in a zoo they’re going to act like wolves but there are going to be certain things that are changed about the way they behave and yet you can’t erase the instincts. For me, improvisation is a way to live in and look at what is instinctual and what is learned. As you know as a dancer, when we start improvising, it’s sort of like clearing out the pipes of all the stuff that’s been patterned



Photo by Pak Han

into us and finding a way to get at something that feels deeper and that takes time. My role as director is to set up structures that support the dancers in tracking and reflecting on what’s influencing their choices.

I start all my rehearsals by doing this almanac practice. It uses the position of the sun and the moon, these planetary forces that are invisible to us but that represent things about the season and also the phase of the moon, which affects tide cycles and pulls on the body of water that we are, and it’s like tuning your instrument, you tune it before you play. That’s what we do, we tune to these forces that historically have been used by people to decide how we live in the natural world and survive, what kind of food we eat, when we plant, when we harvest, what we do about insects, which animals we track—there’s a whole folk technology that people have developed. That’s what the Farmer’s Almanac is in North America. There are lots of other ways to do it.

SB: Take us through what that looks like in practice.

NH: I consult the position of the sun and the moon on the app iLuna. In western almanacs there are different parts of the body associated with the 12 signs of the zodiac. So for example, today the moon is in Pisces, and Pisces is associated with the feet. And the sun is in Virgo, which is associated with the bowels. And it’s also a full moon today which means that it has some of the strongest gravity pull. So we drop into our bodies to sense and allow movement to arise from sensation in the feet and the intestines. It’s very internally, sensory focused. It’s not about warming up your muscles or reviewing anything. It’s about a way of heightening your sensitivity to the parts of the body that are associated with the positions of the planets. So if I can really notice and track those parts of my body as the starting point of my practice

session, then I’m literally aligned with these larger forces. There are also non-western systems that I’m not trained in any meaningful way—for example, traditional Chinese medicine has other associations with those parts of the body—so I leap frog between different systems to find ways to give the dancers options to reflect. We do this for about 8-9 minutes. With the wolf pack I’ve been doing a process where we immediately go into a very open, not terribly structured group improv with more tactile connection because we’re consciously trying to build a sensory feeling of being a pack. We’ll work certain kinds of scores that are about things like establishing who’s the alpha, who’s the interloper.

It’s different with each one of the animals. With the vaquita, because they are becoming extinct, and they tend to live in pairs, what I’ve been doing with Mallory [Markham] is playing with this idea of what happens when you’re the last one left—what does it feel like when you’re trying to find another one and can’t? We’ve been doing a lot of improvising with what it would be like if sound were the way she navigated, not sight. How can you heighten a sensitivity to where you are in the room if you imagine you’re broadcasting sound and nothing bounces back? How do you approximate echolocation as a human? We don’t hear that well but we do have stereo hearing. We’re trying to cultivate and foreground instincts we have but don’t rely upon as humans.

SB: What about the crows?

NH: Crows have this two-stage breathing—when they take in air, it first goes into these empty sacs in their bones. Then they have another pressure action that sends it into the lungs and back out. That’s part of why they’re so buoyant, they have these hollow chambers in their leg bones and pelvises. So Jennifer [Twilley Jerum], Jesse [Wiener],

and I spent a lot of time in the beginning exploring what would it be if your pelvis was the most buoyant part of the body instead of the most weighty. What kind of movement might arise? Of course, as a human being it doesn’t feel that way but if you spend enough time initiating, sensing, organizing your movement around certain things, you construct an alternate sense of what your body is, so it’s almost like inhabiting a different form.

SB: The message from climate change is that we’re running out of time. The almanac practice seems to acknowledge that we’re running out of time, but we also can’t rush.

NH: If I look at this project and my *King Tide* project, one thing I’ve been doing since 2013 is slowing down. It’s not like we have to hurry up to make something happen. Things are happening and we’re not being present with them. So the choice to slow down and take time reveals what is actually going on. Part of the problem with human responses to climate change is that we’re in this panic mode so we’re not seeing clearly, either ourselves and our choices or the impact they have on the environment. If I could really visualize every piece of plastic I’ve ever bought, how it’s going to be here for another 500 years, instead of feeling despair or guilt, what if I could really slow down and make a different choice? In the rehearsal process it feels really restorative. We’re really living because we’re present and that is intrinsically hopeful. I think there’s a possibility for even in a troubled climate or state of things falling apart to make choices that are about living into the future, not just waiting for time to run out. And that’s what I think being a dancer offers. We’re lucky we have this practice. If we want to use it in this way, we can connect with each other, we can create a reality out of nothing but ourselves and time, and that impacts other people. I



believe that if we're more in tune and aligned we're going to make better choices.

SB: It seems like so much of your process is about sloughing off automatic movement habits to find, not new pathways, but new experiences of old pathways. As a viewer, I felt like I was being afforded a real-time experience of attunement within a structure. That's what creatures are—attunements in a structure, where we can't do absolutely anything we want. I can't swing from a tree right now or soar above this coffee shop, but I've something to learn from creatures who can. What do you hope audiences will experience at the performance?

NH: I'm interested in taking the time to sift through and be conscious of what feels like a human response, what feels like an animal response, what feels like a disorientation, something that wouldn't normally arise because it's not a familiar dance response. I would feel like I had missed an opportunity if this piece ended up being full from start to finish with dance vocabulary. On the other hand, I'm not attempting to fool anybody into thinking we're not humans in a dance lineage making a dance event happen. So what is it within those parameters that we can do that opens up perception and an experience of self that is more responsive to its surroundings?

A lot of what I do in this directing practice is set something in motion, witness it, then interview the dancers about what happened. Then they reflect and I listen. I study them and listen and reframe what the task is based on that conversational practice. What you see when you see a performance is just the next cycle of it.

SB: It sounds like you're inviting audiences to drop into your practice, rather than witness a spectacle. What can you do to help audiences understand that invitation? A program note that says, "Thank you for coming and dropping into our practice"? I for one will come to the show in November and really think about my role as a listener—to my thoughts and sensations as much as to the sights and sounds unfolding around me—as an integral part of what's happening.

NH: I want it to be like going for a walk in a regional park. As city dwellers, we selectively immerse ourselves in nature, but parks are designed experiences. And yet, nature will do what it's going to do whether or not we're there. It's in process all the time independently of our presence. It's impacted by our presence. We have an opportunity to be impacted by it. What's different is that the performance foregrounds what it means to be human, whereas if you and I go for a walk in Tilden park, there's nothing about it

overtly that says, pay attention to what makes you a specific creature having an impact on the environment around you.

SB: So one reason for doing a performance of such a rich practice is to invite audiences into your ecosystem.

NH: The audiences are going to be small. You get an experience of being connected to other audience members. There's a bunch of creatures in the room and this is how I'm behaving—why am I behaving like this? Why did I choose to come over here? Why do I feel more comfortable?

SB: Would you consider leading your audience in an almanac improvisation as a way to transition into the performance, to drop into the practice?

NH: The dancers' idea was to have the wolf pack bring people into the space. So one of them comes up to me as an audience member, connects with me personally, leads me into the space, helps me choose where I want to be, settles down with me and says, maybe, let's breathe together, does something that's like what we do when we're in rehearsal. It will take a little time.

Part of why I wanted to work with Ian [Winters] and media was to have ways to change what you see and hear at certain crucial junctures based upon what the audience does—what they get close to, what they get far away from, if they're making a lot of noise, if they're being quiet, if they're all in one big throng or if they spread themselves out.

SB: So the environment is reacting to them. How does it do that?

NH: Ian and I decided, what if it was like a Wizard of Oz kind of thing? What if David [Coll] is up in the tech booth, responding to what he observes about how people are behaving. Ian pointed out that that is actually the way nature is, it's not this programmed thing that every time I get this close or move away quickly you see the same thing happen. What happens in nature is I get close to something and it doesn't know that I'm a danger and it doesn't respond. And then over time I have impacted it but it's not immediately apparent to me. I'm not in control of it but it is responsive and it takes me a little while to understand. That's what I want people to reflect upon.

SB: It feels like no matter what you do, the work is so grounded in deep research and practice that it can't help but be a something.

NH: Yeah, it is a something. It's not a spectacle even though it has a lot of those elements.

SB: Well, we've learned from Yvonne Rainer that you can say no to spectacle all you want and that doesn't necessarily reduce spectacularity. You can have all the bells and whistles, but if you're inviting us into a world where the visual is not primary then you're intervening into spectacle.

NH: Moving from spectacle to proprioception in an almost subliminal way. I hope it works.

SIMA BELMAR, PH.D., is a Lecturer in the Department of Theater, Dance, & Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and the ODC Writer in Residence. To keep up with Sima's writing please subscribe to tinyletter.com/simabelmar.

Nina Haft & Company presents Precarious Pod, Nov 15-24, Joe Goode Annex, SF, ninahaftandcompany.com

Dialogues in the Diaspora

» Continued from pg 2

dance to. "It happened, I don't deserve this, it's not my fault," were repeated at different times in the show. Moreover, we wore simple tunics (kurtas), went casual with how we wore our hair, and the composer (Roopa Mahadevan) brought in harmonies and piano to bring the story together. All are atypical in bharatanatyam. As a result, the work looked and sounded totally different than a bharatanatyam performance, but to me it also felt authentic and more true to the experiences of the women we portrayed.

How far away can the new lines of traditional arts be drawn? It's a question I have been asking this year while choreographing on two brilliant dancers, Randee Pauve (Pauve Dance) and Shruti Abhishek, through the CHIME residency supported by the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company. This year long creative inquiry was meant to see how the different backgrounds of the dancers (Shruti being a bharatanatyam dancer and Randee being primarily a modern/contemporary trained dancer) would influence my choices in movement and the narrative. What started as a deconstruction of bharatanatyam vocabulary has become a truth-seeking journey about lineage, ancestry, and the past. To some degree, this inquiry isn't as outwardly political as *Broken Seeds* or *Unfiltered*, and some parts of it are not at all bharatanatyam as we currently know it. Regardless, Randee and Shruti dance together, and at this moment, that dialogue feels really crucial. In this political era, this is not only deviating from a traditional art form, this is a form of activism.

I am not the first to bring new elements into bharatanatyam, or to make political work. In fact, it seems to be trending now among new dance makers, and there are of course the few senior dance teacher/choreographers who have been making this kind of work for decades in the US, India, and other parts of the world. Whether it was back then or right now, there will always be arguments between people who think they are purists and people who think they are innovators. But regardless of those differences, it's crucial that we look towards the future of our dancemaking specifically through 1) building capacity for emerging artists to take risks in their work, 2) building platforms for critical dance writing, and 3) bridging the gaps between funding sources and the bharatanatyam artists who need it. Given the critical mass of bharatanatyam dancers in the Bay Area, these shouldn't be out of reach, and while there are a few advocates starting to make some of this happen, we need to do more.

There are other aspects of bharatanatyam that cannot be ignored. It's past and present



is fraught with appropriation, classism, and inconsistent pay structures, and these must be addressed as we move forward. We must look at how all of these play into our individual artistic practices. Our work is motivated by our love for the art form, but what are we doing to ensure it continues to thrive in its new home. Are we dancers asking for the compensation we deserve? Are we speaking out against mediocrity? How does the western gaze play into our work? Are we reaching across disciplines to support other artistic practices? We can continue to experiment with the boundaries of bharatanatyam or not, but we cannot operate in a vacuum. Our professional practices, choreographic choices, and the stories we tell are shaping the world we dance and live in, and we need to own our place in it.

NADHI THEKKEK is a bharatanatyam dancer and Artistic Director of Nava Dance Theatre, a bharatanatyam dance company based in San Francisco. As a first generation, American-born, South Asian woman in the diaspora, Nadhi uses her artistic practice to examine place, identity, and politics. Her work has been supported by CounterPulse Performing Diaspora, CA\$H Grants, Zellerbach Family Foundation, and others. Nadhi trained under gurus Smt. Sundara Swaminathan (Artistic Director of Kala Vandana Dance Company), Smt. Padmini Chari (Artistic Director of Nitya School of Dance). As of 2012, she has continued training under Guru Sri. A. Lakshmanaswamy in Chennai, India. Her company will perform dance excerpts of *Broken Seeds Still Grow* during the Rotunda Dance Series on November 8.

nadhithethekkek.com
navadance.org

Rotunda Dance Series presents Nava Dance Theatre, Nov 8, SF City Hall, SF, dancersgroup.org/rotunda

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calendar

VISIT THE ONLINE COMMUNITY CALENDAR, to find additional events and to submit a performance. dancersgroup.org

Noche Flamenca

Z Space, SF

Conceived, choreographed, and directed by Noche Flamenca Artistic Director Martín Santangelo and lead dancer Soledad Barrio, *Entre Tú y Yo* explores through dance the possibilities afforded and constraints imposed by relationships. Thu-Sat, Oct 31-Nov 2, 7:30pm; Sun, Nov 3, 2pm; Tue-Sat, Nov 5-9, 7:30pm; Sun, Nov 10 at 2pm; Tue-Sat, Nov 12-16, 7:30pm, \$25-\$70.

zspace.org/entre-tu-y-yo

Oakland Ballet

Paramount Theatre, Oakland

Inspired by Dia de los Muertos, *Luna Mexicana* is a medley of exuberant dance, joyful music, colorful costumes, flowers, candles, food, and celebration of family. Fri, Nov 1, 7:30pm; Sat, Nov 2, 4pm, \$24-200.

oaklandballet.org

*Surabhi Bharadwaj

ODC Theater, SF

Ashrutam – The Unheard Voice is an Indian classical dance production, recognizing and honoring the contribution of Devadasis to the Indian Performing Arts. Devadasi represents a matriarchal community of women who not only cultivated Performing Arts through the generations but were also progressive women who broke societal stereotypes several centuries ago. Fri, Nov 1, 7:30pm; Sat, Nov 2, 3pm & 7:30pm, \$25-60

ashrutam.com

IncivilitySF

EXIT Theatre, SF

IncivilitySF returns for its third election cycle, with an all-star lineup of activist artists, All Fenner, Praba Pilar, Larry Bogad, and A. Spearman & Co., working with themes of social justice, community-empowerment, and political awakening. Fri-Sat, Nov 1-2, 8pm, \$10-\$25

eventbrite.com

*Lenora Lee Dance

Dance Mission Theater, SF

Celebrating its 12th Anniversary Season with the World Premiere of multimedia dance production, *In the Skin of Her Hands*. Inspired by the lives and experiences of breast cancer survivors, this piece is a journey through healing, compassion, and forgiveness in the face of the unknown. Fri-Su, Nov 1-3, 5pm & 8pm, \$25-60

lenoraleedance.com



Lenora Lee Dance, Nov 1-3 / Photo by Robbie Sweeny

Hannah Young, Swathi Lakshmanan, Jennifer Gerry, Vidhya Subramanian

SAFEhouse Arts, SF

RAW (resident artist workshop) presents new work by Hannah Young, Swathi Lakshmanan, Jennifer Gerry, and Vidhya Subramanian that explores various styles and themes of dance theater, Bharatanatyam, film and mental health. Fri, Nov 1, 8pm; Sun, Nov 3, 7pm, \$15-\$20

safehousearts.org

“Glo” Artist Showcase

SAFEhouse Arts, SF

Bahiya Movement presents Dwanna Timms of DW Timms, Dominique Lateur and Sierra Taylor-Cline, A. Spearman & Co., and Bahiya Movement showcasing new work. Sat, Nov 2, 8pm, \$15-\$20.

safehousearts.org

San Francisco Dance Film Festival

Art and experimental, documentaries, family films, live performance capture, and shorts,



San Francisco International Hip Hop DanceFest, Nov 22-24 / Photo by Anne-Sylvie Bonnet

the stories span an emotional range but share one common thread: compelling dance entertainment. Times, venues, prices and screenings vary.

sfdancefilmfest.org.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

Bankhead Theater, Livermore

With dual home cities, one nestled in the Rocky Mountains, the other gracing the Southwestern plateau, the two-decade-old contemporary ballet company actively cultivates new ballets and choreographic talent, resulting in a catalog of adventurous repertoire. Sun, Nov 3, 3pm, \$20 – \$95

lvpac.org

Dance Collage

City College of San Francisco Wellness Center

A day of workshops and performances bringing together Bay Area colleges, artists and students to celebrate community. Sun, Nov 3, 12:30-7:30pm, \$1-\$20

ccsf.edu

Kathy Mata Ballet

LINES Dance Center, SF

Kathy Mata Ballet presents new work along with dances from the August showcase with accompaniment by music director/accompanist, Lucy Hudson and accompanist Michael Dolman. Sun, Nov 3, 3:30-5:30pm, **FREE**

kathymataballet.org

Printz Dance Project

Joe Goode Annex, SF

Past/Present (2) will include past repertory favorites along with new company work, a performance workshop piece, and screening of a short dance film. Thu-Sat, Nov 7-9, 8pm; Sat, Nov 9, 5pm, \$25.

printzdance.org

Rotunda Dance Series: Nava Dance Theatre

San Francisco City Hall

The Rotunda Dance Series brings many of the Bay Area's most celebrated dance companies



Hope Mohr Dance Bridge Project, Nov 8-9 / Photo by Hillary Goidell



USF Dance Ensemble, Nov 21-23/ Photo by Robbie Sweeny



Printz Dance Project, Nov 7-9 / Photo by Jeff Zender

to San Francisco City Hall for free monthly noon-time performances and is presented by Dancers' Group and World Arts West in partnership with Grants for the Arts and SF City Hall. Fri, Nov 8, 12pm, **FREE** dancersgroup.org/rotunda

Dance Mission Theater

Herbst Theater, SF

¡Adelante!, the 20th Anniversary Celebration of Dance Mission Theater, will feature performances by Dance Brigade, Grrrl Brigade, Arenas Dance Company, Duniya Dance and Drum, Micaya, Allan Frias, Alayo Dance Company and more. Fri, Nov 8, 7:30-9:30, \$10-\$50. dancemissiontheater.org

Hope Mohr Dance Bridge Project

ODC Theater, SF

Signals from the West has commissioned ten Bay Area artists from diverse disciplines and backgrounds to create new works of art in response to Merce Cunningham's legacy. Saturday's performance will feature a pre-show Haptic Tour and Live Audio Description by Gravity Access Services. Fri-Sat, Nov 8-9, 8pm, \$20-\$50. hopemohr.org

Diablo Ballet

Del Valle Theatre, Walnut Creek

Family-friendly ballet, *A Swingin' Holiday*, created by Broadway's Sean Kelly, is set to the exhilarating music of the '30s and '40s. The program will include *The Nutcracker Suite* by Julia Adam, former principal dancer with San Francisco Ballet. Fri-Sat, Nov 8-9, 8pm; Sat-Sun, Nov 9-10, 2pm, \$15-\$50 diabloballet.org

Cairo Cabaret

El Valenciano Restaurant, SF

Cairo Cabaret includes live Arabic music featuring the Georges Lammam Ensemble, dance performances by Parya Dance, Abigail Keyes Dance, Janelle Rodriguez, Rachel Duff,

Tina Vanessa, Kayla Belly Dance, with special guest dancers and Middle Eastern food and drinks. Thu, Nov 14, 8pm, \$12-\$15. cairo-cabaret.square.site

Tere O'Connor Dance

ODC Theater, SF

Long Run is a major work which pushes the emotional content of Tere O'Connor's movement to new physical extremes, allowing time-based elements like polyrhythms, velocity and duration to become critical forces, overtaking the eight performers as they struggle to bring their bodies into a state of calm. Thu-Sat, Nov 14-16, 8pm, \$15-\$30. odc.dance

FLACC 2019:

Bridges & Bones / Puentes Y Huesos Dance Mission Theater, SF

Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers is celebrating its 6th annual showcase, replacing ideas of borders and walls that separate and erase Latinxs in the US by creating cultural bridges, honoring ancestors and building artistic alliances to support and unify 15 dance companies. Fri-Sat, Nov 15-16, 8-10pm, \$20-32. flaccdanza.org

Juliet Paramor, Annalise Constantz, Ezra Unterseher

SAFEhouse Arts, SF

RAW (resident artist workshop) presents new work by Juliet Paramor, Annalise Constantz, and Navigational Dance that explores themes of poetry, nature, habit and choice. Fri-Sat, Nov 15-16, 8pm, \$15-\$20. safehousearts.org

Nina Haft & Company

Joe Goode Annex, SF

The World Premiere of *Precarious Pod*, an immersive and interactive dance performance about animal instinct and planetary change, asking: what do animals teach us about cooperation and survival? *Article on page 7.* Fri-Sun, Nov 15-17, Nov 22-24, Fri-Sat 7pm & 9pm, Sun 4pm & 6pm ninahaftandcompany.com

NewGround Theatre Dance Company

Arts Unify Movement Center, San Mateo

A re-imagined production exploring grief and bereavement through the eyes of five characters struggling to come to terms with the loss of a loved one. Fri-Sat, Nov 15-16, 8pm; Sat-Sun, Nov 16-17, 2pm, \$30 artsunitymovement.com/newgrounddance

pateldanceworks

The Finnish Hall, Berkeley

Seven dancers in sections of movement, spoken word, storytelling, and meditation. Sat-Sun, Nov 16-17, 7pm, **FREE** bhumibpatel.co

Prayukti Arts : Nitya Narasimhan

Zohar School & Company, Palo Alto

The Margam is relative and subjective, flexible enough to incorporate a variety of dance compositions set in the Bharatanatyam movement vocabulary. A Margam typically consists of an invocatory piece, a central piece, abhinaya pieces and a culminating piece. Sun, Nov 16-17, 5-6:30pm, \$15. nityanarasimhan.com

Astana Ballet

Herbst Theater, SF

The Heritage of the Great Steppe, a Kazakh folk dance. The evening includes three neoclassical one-act ballets, with two of the pieces by Brazilian choreographer Ricardo Amarante. Tue, Nov 19 7:30pm, \$90. astanaballet.com/en



SAFEhouse Arts RAW, Nov 21 / Photo courtesy of artist



Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, Nov 3 / Photo courtesy of the artist

AIRspace

SAFEhouse Arts, SF

AIRspace residents, randy reyes, Kevin Wong, Europa Grace & Kim Ip, present new work. AIRspace is a year-long artist residency program for queer and trans people of color. Thu, Nov 21, 8pm, \$15-\$20. safehousearts.org

USF Dance Ensemble

Lone Mountain Studio Theater, SF

STILL STANDING will feature new works by: Alma Esperanza Cunningham, Cherie Hill, dana e. fitchett and alumnus Melissa Lewis. Guest artists Kinetech Arts. Thu-Sat, Nov 21-23, 8pm, \$5-\$10. usfca.edu/pasjevents



IncivilitySF, Nov 1-2 / Photo by Serrano



Tere O'Connor Dance, Nov 14-16 / Photo by Ben McKeown

San Francisco International Hip Hop DanceFest

Palace of Fine Arts, SF

The 21st Annual San Francisco International Hip Hop DanceFest features nearly one dozen innovative hip-hop performances from dance companies from around the globe. Under the umbrella of hip hop, this year's festival showcases work that draws variously from b-boying, breaking, popping, freestyle, locking, clubbing, housing, voguing and urban choreography. Fri-Sat, Nov 22-23, 8pm, Sun, Nov 24, 12noon & 5pm, \$47-57. sfhiphopdancefest.com

FLACC 2019: Bridges & Bones / Puentes Y Huesos

Berkeley Art Museum And Pacific Film Archive

Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers is celebrating its 6th annual showcase, replacing ideas of borders and walls that separate and erase Latinxs in the US by creating cultural bridges, honoring ancestors and building artistic alliances to support and unify 15 dance companies. Fri-Sat, Nov 22-23, 4-6pm, \$11-65. flaccdanza.org

Project Aiwa

Shelton Theater, SF

Performances by Cirque Du Soleil alumni & Whirling Dervish Gregangelo Herrera, Contortionist Jeliza Rose, and otherworldly Bellydancers Ahava, Andrea Sendek, Tammy Johnson, Rose Harden, Tre Henderson and more. Live music by Bouchaib Abdelhadi and the event features Algerian dancer Esraa Warda. Sat, Nov 30, 3pm & 6:30pm, \$30-\$50. eventbrite.com

Video Tips: Documenting Your Work

by LINDSAY GAUTHIER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AT RAPT PRODUCTIONS

1. **Communicate with your videographer.** Let them know what specific preferences you have. The more they know, the better equipped they are to meet your needs. If there is anything out of the ordinary or unexpected in your performance, like dancers entering the audience, let your videographer know ahead of time so they can plan for it and make better decisions.

2. **Think about camera placement.** For instance, if the theater has a steep rake, a camera placed in the back row will be looking down onto the dance. This tends to create short bodies and a flat dance. A camera that is close will give the most dynamic and pleasing image, but it may not be wide enough to capture the whole stage. Maybe something in the middle is preferable. It is best to consider how you want to utilize your video in the end, and then make your decisions for camera placement accordingly.

3. **Reserve a place for your videographer before you sell tickets.** This way you won't be forced to give them an unpleasant angle of view.

4. **Try to avoid black costumes on black backgrounds.** This can lead to dancers' bodies disappearing into their environment.

5. **Provide enough light for the camera to capture the dance well. Sometimes we design dark lighting to create a mood for our audience.** It's great for the live experience, and yet dark lighting can make it hard for the camera to capture a clear image. If you know you have a dark lighting design, try bumping up the lights a bit during the performance that will be filmed.
6. **Cameras can also have a hard time with extremely contrasting light, either under-exposing dark areas or over exposing bright areas.** For instance, if you design a scene with a dancer in a spotlight in conjunction with other important dancers in semi darkness the contrast will be more extreme on the camera than it is to your eyes. Try balancing the contrast a bit more in these scenes so the camera can capture all of the dancers.

7. **Negotiate with your videographer ahead of time to receive the raw files of your video footage and plan to store them properly.** Highly compressed videos (like dvds) don't make a good archival format. Ask for raw or high quality copies of your footage, and keep two copies of your video files in two different locations. This is the best way to make sure your archives are preserved and safe.
8. **Video documentation of your work is important.** Translating the energy of a live performance to a 2D video is challenging. Quality video documentation can make the camera disappear and the dance really come through. Having quality video can be the deciding factor in how an outside grant panel or presenter thinks about your work. Grant panels need to feel the work, not just see the work from a distance. So don't sacrifice your video documentation. If done well, it can provide untold awards.

RAPT PRODUCTIONS has been filming dance in the Bay Area for over two decades. Their mission is to empower companies, arts organizations, and educational institutions to best enhance and promote their work through compelling media content. Artistic Director, Lindsay Gauthier, is a retired dancer and choreographer turned filmmaker who has been filming dance for over eleven years, working with companies such as the San Francisco Ballet, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. She also directs, produces, and edits dance films, promotional films, and documentaries. Her dance films have screened nationally and internationally, including in New York, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. Gauthier is also the Creative Producer of the San Francisco Dance Film Festival's Co-Laboratory project, in which she guides and facilitates collaborations between professional filmmakers and professional dance choreographers to make short dance films. Lindsay Gauthier and Rapt Productions are dedicated to supporting the Bay Area dance community through archival, creative, and promotional dance video creation.

Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers

My only hope, is in your eyes.
—GUILLERMO GOMEZ PEÑA

In the next few weeks, the Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers or FLACC for short, will be back on stage presenting “*Bridges & Bones, Puentes Y Huesos*.” Liz Boubion, along with Juan Adalpe Muñoz and a few other brave souls have kept this platform running, in what most certainly can be called a labor of love. I have witnessed the festival's development from the start; “To elevate Bay Area Latino/a/x choreographers out of isolation and into a supported arena by encouraging a culture of shared support through processes, as well as engaging with established artists, and artist centered resources.” As a recovering curator/presenter in San Francisco (insert canned laughter here), I know this is no small task. Their commitment endures, and this year they feature 15 Latinx choreographers from across the U.S. with the intention of confronting ideas of borders and walls while sharing the weight of their collective bridge building.

This festival was designed as an international collaborative effort. Now, six years later, and with almost a half-dozen partners across San Francisco and Berkeley, FLACC has grown to be a platform where the already existing presence of deeply rooted Latinx performance artists are supported. In this modest span of time, it has featured over 50 Bay Area Latinx performance makers while hosting artist discussions, panels, lectures, and master movement classes. FLACC holds space for those that mean to explore performance art with a Latinx lense, a succinct interrogation from both artists and audiences.

flaccdanza.org

—Ernesto Sopprani



Photo of Gizel Muniz by Adrian Flores Peraza

BOOK HIGHLIGHT



MAKING DANCES THAT MATTER: Resources for Community Creativity

By ANNA HALPRIN WITH RACHEL KAPLAN

Anna Halprin, teacher, artist, healer, and friend, has created ground-breaking dances with people all over the world; and she has lovingly defied traditional notions of dance, “Anna has extended its boundaries to address social issues, build community, foster both physical and emotional healing, and connect people to nature.”

The aptly titled *Making Dances That Matter*, provides a forum for Halprin, and co-author Rachel Kaplan, to present her philosophy, and experience, that foster individual and group well-being. The book provides a guide to Halprin's celebrated Planetary Dance. For 39 years the Planetary Dance has promoted peace among people and peace with the Earth. Open to everyone, it has been performed in more than 50 countries. In 1995 more than 400 participants joined Halprin in a Planetary Dance in Berlin commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Potsdam Agreements, at the end of World War II. More recently, she took the Planetary Dance to Israel, bringing together Israelis and Palestinians. Throughout this book Halprin shows dance as a powerful tool for healing, learning and mobilizing change.

Anna Halprin founded the groundbreaking San Francisco Dancers Workshop in 1955 and the Tamalpa Institute in 1978 with her daughter Daria Halprin. She is the author of several books including *Moving Toward Life*, published by Wesleyan University Press in 1995. Rachel Kaplan is a psychotherapist specializing in somatic healing.

Wesleyan University Press, 2019

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TERRY SENDGRAFF: We See You Flying!

by ANNE BLUETHENTHAL AND AILEEN MOFFITT

The earth could not contain Terry, so she took to the sky. And when circumstances made it impossible for her to fly anymore, she overcame her terrestrial uncertainties like some creative shapeshifter, until finally she transformed into a brilliant light.

—ADELE PRANDINI

TERRY ANN SENDGRAFF, dance pioneer, matriarch of aerial dance, visionary artist, and deeply influential teacher transitioned peacefully in her home in Oakland, California on September 6, 2019. She was 85 years old.

An icon in the San Francisco Bay Area, Terry influenced the fields of performance, improvisation, and aerial dance. While she has been called the “mother of aerial dance” because of her impact on so many aerial artists, Terry’s reach extends nationally and internationally, and can be felt in the bodies of artists, friends, and colleagues across all disciplines. For those of us in the Bay Area who were making work from the 70’s to the 90’s, there is scarcely one who was not directly or indirectly touched by her work.

Terry had a spark like a mischievous child delighted with life, pleased with her body, always curious, playing, sensing. Master of the present moment, Terry was an embodied sage, a pilot of the flying body who taught hundreds to take flight. She taught women to walk tall—on stilts and in their heart and in the streets. No one is more responsible for the Bay Area as home base for aerial dance than Terry Sendgraff.

—KEITH HENNESSY (CIRCO ZERO)

Terry was born on October 12, 1933 in Ft. Myers, Florida. It was there, in the warm winds of southwest Florida, where her desire to dance and to fly was first ignited. Terry earned her BA in Recreation from Pennsylvania State University in 1955, and fashioned a career in both dance and gymnastics. She was involved in crafting the earliest national standards for competitive gymnastics for girls and women, earned her MA in Dance from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and coached women’s gymnastics and taught dance at Arizona State University. During her studies, Terry’s exposure to the work of Alwin Nikolais, José Limón, Charles Weidman, and Merce Cunningham were a great inspiration, nourishing her developing aesthetic.

Terry’s work has been prolific, impressive, beautiful, often hilarious, sometimes understated, sometimes breathtakingly spectacular. The sphere of Terry’s influence is enormous; the evidence of her mark, ubiquitous. She was able to shape her passions into a new art form and to generously gift that back to the world, watching its flame catch and burn for a whole generation of artists.

—ANNE BLUETHENTHAL (ABD/SKYWATCHERS)

Terry’s was a liberatory arts voice, informed by impeccable technique and fueled by the freedom of improvisation. Although invigorated by the rigor and structure of the forms she was studying, Terry was increasingly drawn to awareness-oriented movement forms, finding the traditional dance and gymnastic canons restrictive. Determined to find her own dance, Terry moved to California where she developed a movement and performance practice, pedagogy, and opus that blended her extensive dance and gymnastics backgrounds with her passion for improvisation and the emerging counterculture of 1970’s Bay Area. Terry’s teaching style was influenced by the developing “Motional Improvisation” work of her mentor and lifelong friend Al Wunder.

Terry was ageless, wise, childlike, and methodical. She introduced me to aerial work and taught me that the magic of the piece is the life that the apparatus reveals to you as you work with it. How you relate to this new creature is what the audience will see and, if done well, will feel its power, magic and choreographic prowess. I remember once I had to jump off a ladder, land in the hoop, and swing high and far not hitting anything on my way back from the swing. With her voice guiding me, off I would go like I had wings!

—KIM EPIFANO (EPIPHANY DANCE)

Years before the term aerial dance was popularized, Terry had a studio full of flying dancers working from her innovative low flying trapezes. She named her work Motivity. Terry is credited with discovering and deploying in performance the single point trapeze that allowed expansive possibilities not seen with parallel rope trapezes. Over time, aerial dance emerged as a popular post-modern dance genre that has grown and taken root as an intrinsic part of the contemporary performing arts vocabulary.

The essence of Motivity, though, was Terry Sendgraff herself. With her keen ability to elicit the gifts and unique voice of each student, she helped them to hone their aesthetic values. She used a system of heightened sensory awareness while on the ground and in the air, a rigor of practice in the present moment that called out the best and the wholeness of her students and colleagues. Motivity was an embodied blend of personal, political, and spiritual.

“...Motivity, stands as the roots and trunk of the aerial dance family tree. Many aerial dancers, like Jo Kreiter (Flyaway Productions), Amelia Rudolph (Project Bandaloop), and Joanna Haigood (Zaccho Dance Theatre), have sprung from the branches of the Sendgraff/Motivity tree.”

—JANINE GASTINEAU (2002, ARTS PAPER OF BOULDER)

During these years of experimentation, innovation, and community building, Terry was helping to shape a sub-culture through dance in the Bay Area. An out lesbian choreographer, she was able to speak across all sectors as a performer, teacher, and as culture-shaper, galvanizing a generation of performing artists across disciplines.

She left us so much—touched so many of us. I’m a 4’7” woman walking tall. She did that literally; but the meaning behind it was: stand up! I’m trying to live up to that.

—SHAKIRI

While Terry’s choreography ranged from whimsical to profound, and her performance persona from innocent to sophisticated, her audiences were treated to unexpected surprises. Between 1974 and 2007, Terry created over three hundred performances including her celebrated birthday performances (1974-83) and her unprecedented *A Year of Sundays* (1977-78). Performance venues ranged from a golf course fairway to a proscenium stage. She directed several distinct but related dance companies including *Fly By Night* (1978-1980)—the first women’s trapeze dancing troupe in the country—and the Motivity Company (throughout the 1980’s and beyond).

Long before it was a cultural trend, Terry was gathering up women from all walks of life to participate in her happenings. Whether it was Women Walking Tall or her ongoing improv groups or the countless people she trained on the low flying trapeze, she was bringing people together in site specific works infused with social justice, and the



Photo by Savage Photography



power and beauty of her women identified sensibility. Terry was an absolutely essential part of the dance community for 40 years. She was in love with the color red.

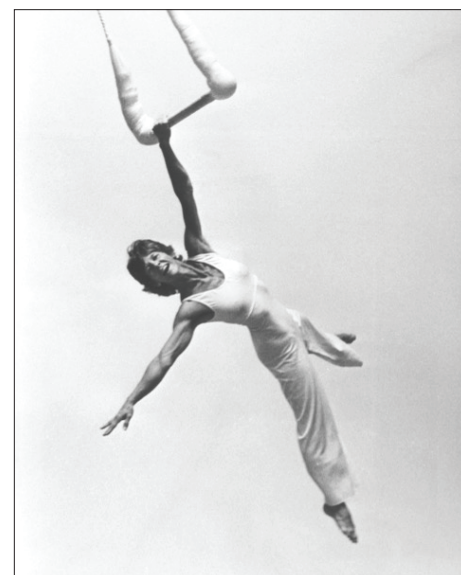
—KRISSY KEEFER (DANCE BRIGADE)

An irrepressible art spirit, Terry Sendgraff kept innovating. In addition to her multi-level trapezes, she was among the first to use bungee cords in dance performances. Struck with breast cancer in 1984, her process, her recovery, and her one-breasted body became the subject of several pieces including one of her most memorable (and acclaimed) works, *Hovering* (1988). Launching into another performance medium, Terry took up stilt walking at age 57 to create *Women Walking Tall* (1991-95). Originally a commissioned performance for the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, *Women Walking Tall* expanded to a community project that empowered hundreds of women to walk, dance, and perform on stilts.

Terry Sendgraff was the singularly most creative person I have ever met. She was an artist to her core and to the end of her life, and her vast empathy led her to actually “see” people in their most productive light.

—Wendy Diamond

The enthusiasm that met Motivity—both the aerial work and her teaching of sensory awareness, presence, and improvisation—led her to explore more deeply what she called the marriage of the “motional and the emotional,” by earning a master’s degree in Clinical Psychology from John F. Kennedy University in 1986.



What a force Terry was/is! A huge supporter and friend to me and to AXIS Dance Company, she is a huge part of why we kept creating and performing. She started AXIS off on aerial work and we shared the stage with her in her productions many times in our early years. Terry was an under-sung heroine of the air and the dance floor.

—JUDITH SMITH (AXIS DANCE COMPANY)

Terry Sendgraff received many honors throughout her career, including three Isadora Duncan Dance Awards for Solo Performance (1989), Choreography (2001) and Sustained Achievement (2005). She was a featured artist and faculty member at the Annual International Aerial Dance Festival in Boulder, Colorado (1999-2005). Her career was also chronicled by Jeff Friedman as an oral history for The Legacy Project (1991). She received numerous grant awards, most notably a Choreographer’s Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (1993-1994) and Artist Residencies from the California Arts Council (1993, 1994). In 1990, PBS aired *Can You See Me Flying: A Portrait of Terry Sendgraff*, by filmmaker Fawn Yacker. A larger than life sized bronze sculpture of Terry is part of a group of sculptures called *Dance* (1974), created by John Waddell that can be viewed in front of the Herberger Theater Center in Phoenix, Arizona. She published her memoir *Can You See Me Flying: Memoir of an Aerial Dance Pioneer* in July 2018.

Terry was a visionary artist, a healer, an irrepressible adventurer. She has given us so many gifts but none more powerful than the creative inspiration to awaken our bodies and spirits to the joy of life.

—JOANNA HAIGOOD (ZACCHO DANCE THEATRE)

Terry will be remembered as a creative choreographer, a brave performer, and as a master teacher. Her gentle and kind guidance allowed so many to blossom physically and emotionally, each encouraged to find their own dance. Countless performance luminaries collaborated or studied with Terry. To name only a handful, the list includes Heather Baer, Anne Bluethenthal, Dudley Brooks, Byron Brown, Joya Cory, Wendy Diamond, Kim Epifano, Debra Floyd, Jill Guillermo-Togawa, Joanna Haigood, Barbara Hammer, Keith Hennessy, Rhodessa Jones, Krissy Keefer, Denise Pate, Adele Prandini, Sharon Page Ritchie, Priscilla Regalado, Shakiri, Judith Smith, Nancy Smith, Jim Tyler, Al Wunder, Nina Wise, Ruth Zaporah. Some of Terry's musical and visual collaborators were Gwen Jones, Kayla Kirsch, Jeanine Chappell, Karen Vogel, Carolyn Brandy, Debbie Fier, and Jennifer Berezan.

Terry is survived by her loving wife, partner, and best friend of nearly 35 years, Aileen Moffitt. She will long be remembered and celebrated by a large group of loving friends, colleagues, collaborators, dancers, and students.

Scholarships in Terry's name are being established for aerial festivals in Colorado and San Francisco. Donations can be made to coloradogives.org/TerrySendgraff, (Frequent Flyers International Aerial Dance Festival), zaccho.org (San Francisco Aerial Arts Festival), or the charity of your choice. For information regarding the fund or for details of Celebration of Life to be held in November, please contact terrysengraffmemorial@gmail.com.

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