



indance

MARCH 2020

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Photo by RJ Muna

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Welcome

by **WAYNE HAZZARD, ARTIST ADMINISTRATOR**

During the 1970's I struggled to understand complex feelings. Simultaneously I was drawn to activities that provided platforms for self-expression that took advantage of the same complex thoughts; sexual awakening, freedom of expression, addiction and body acceptance. A journey towards self-acceptance through self-expression is not unique to me, nor unique to that time. Along with immersing myself in acting and dancing I found solace in photography. Candid images of people fascinated me, and still do.

As an eager photographer, I wielded my SLR Nikon camera as if I was on a fashion shoot. Seeking to capture images that were sexy and alluring, like the ones featured in *After Dark* and *Interview* magazine. I savored magazines like those that featured bold pictorials. Images that celebrated sexual exploration, showing as much skin as possible, were those I returned to often. In the 1970's these were print only publications that exposed me to limitless possibilities of expression. Not surprisingly, my photos were well-intentioned copies at best.

I knew my images were not unique and yet throughout the 70's and early 80's I continued a photographic practice that was informed by patience and repetition. Patience because the images I was copying were often over exposed and out of focus. Each time I was in the dark room my photos revealed bluntly all that I had yet to learn about the mechanics of photography. Repetition, I realized, was a way to try and retry to capture an original image. So, I kept taking photos and assessing each one hoping that some more dominant aesthetic emerged that was mine. I never got there.

I'm in awe, and envious, of photographers that have honed a photographic point of view that is undeniably recognizable when you see their photos. Many of them

work in dance and include RJ Muna, Lois Greenfield, Robbie Sweeny, Marty Sohl, Kegan Marling and Pak Han. These artists make up a short list of photographers that uniquely highlight their subjects.

Each issue of *In Dance* features gloriously good dance images and this month photographer Pak Han talks with Sima Belmar, revealing how he found his way to documenting dance and how he is furthering his craft specializing in street photography. To compliment recent tips on lighting design and videography, we reached out to Kegan Marling to provide tips to consider when engaging a photographer. Kegan writes, "In general, capturing a show can be high-stress - there's one chance for the photographer to catch the action and they usually haven't seen the work in advance." This sentiment rings true for those critiquing dances, too.

Over the first months of 2020 shows like the Grammys, Golden Globes and Oscars have continued to prompt conversations about the tired format of award shows. First time writer for *In Dance* Bhumi Patel, takes on this very important topic and states that, "We are in a time of contradictory desires - one to lose ourselves in the magic of glitz and glam and one to create equity in the performing arts." With the Bay Area's own complex relationship to acknowledging the best in dance this topic will continue to resonate and rile. Go see for yourself at the free community event on March 23 where the Isadora Duncan Dance Awards will announce and honor the latest awardees.

Instead of primarily being known as the year of the Rat, I'm going to name 2020 as a year for more participation. Read more, see more, vote more, and please share more of your unique perspective to ensure that what you believe to be true flourishes.

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

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IN PRACTICE: Photographer Pak Han

by SIMA BELMAR



Photos by Pak Han

MY FATHER IS A PHOTOGRAPHER, and growing up, whenever I was minding my own business, doing my homework or vaccinating my stuffed animals, my father would sneak up to me and say, “Si-i-maaaa...” I’d look up to face a cyclopean cyborg, a phantom of the opera, half human, half Leica. And before I could turn away, click! I fell for it every time.

Annoying as this quickly became, I loved growing up surrounded by photographs—of family in Brooklyn and Moldova, of travels to Europe and Asia, and, above all, of an ever-changing New York City. My father’s street photographs of New York, spanning the period between the 1960s and today, chronicle a rapidly shifting landscape, from the visually stunning, filthy chaos of Times Square to its current state of Disneyfication, from seated subway passengers hidden behind crumpled broadsheet newspapers to straphangers staring into cell phones, necks bent at unnatural angles.

But what most draws me to my father’s street photographs is the way they reflect the movement composition of everyday life. The photographs are candid but rather than seeming to freeze a moment in time, they reveal the viscosity of time itself. Our reality is a shared stretchiness, so even if the woman smoking a cigarette in black pumps is unaware of the woman approaching from around the corner, also in black pumps, they nevertheless existed together in a choreography developing in real time. My dad’s street photographs capture the intercorporeality at the core of our daily lives.

This is probably why I’m so attracted to Pak Han’s dance photography—it looks like street photography, which makes sense considering that Han sees himself as fundamentally a street photographer. Unlike the studio photographs of someone like Lois Greenfield, frozen moments of virtuosity pulled from the context of actual dancing, Han joins the dancer “on the street” to find real-time bodily transactions that tell a story that runs parallel to the dances themselves. Han’s dance photographs have the feeling of being with the world in motion, a process of unconcealment rather than capture. (Yes, I’m being footloose and fancy free with Heidegger here, but since I’m more of an expert on *Footloose* than *Unverborghenheit*, that will be my last reference to the philosopher of being and time.)



Photo by Robert Belmar
Occupancy Spring 1961

Han was born in Korea and spent his early childhood in Osan, a small town on the outskirts of Seoul. His father was an expressionist painter and Han grew up surrounded by art: “My father was painting every day. We lived in a house with a studio on the first floor. Ever since I was little I doodled and I painted. My father taught me how to draw perfect circles and shapes. It was just an everyday activity. Growing up I thought art was going to be my primary occupation and I was going to paint for the rest of my life.” But things changed when Han’s family immigrated to the United States in 1977 after his father fell in love with the US after a one-year teaching gig in Oregon five years prior: “Compared to Korea, there was so much more freedom here as far as creativity and expressing yourself. But taste in art is very different in Korea and the US. My father was relatively successful in Korea but once we immigrated he wasn’t getting the same kind of success. So our family started struggling. My mother started working full time. My father got into the antique business to make money. But he was a horrible businessman. He would open up an antique shop in a location where they don’t have people walking around looking for antiques. I would help out in the shop and we would go to antique shows together. That’s when I started to think, wait a minute, do I want to be an

Han didn’t immediately develop a passion for the one-eyed time machine.

artist? Throughout my teenage years I was in conflict because I felt like art was what I was meant to do but at the same time I sought a steady paycheck.”

So, before graduating from college, Han found steady work with a steady paycheck outside the art field. But he didn’t give up the life of an artist: “I was looking to become an illustrator. I thought about conceptual design for films or television. The job gave me the stability I didn’t experience growing up but there was no creativity in it. In my spare time, I continued to draw and paint. It wasn’t a dream profession, but I did the best I could to have a comfortable life. I started working at age 21 and retired at age 50. I’m 51 now.” Han didn’t want to go into the details of the career he had for 29 years—he has worked hard to keep that life and his artistic endeavors separate.

Though his father had given him a Canon AE-1 camera when he turned 18, Han didn’t immediately develop a passion for the one-eyed time machine. Then, in 2007, a photographer friend encouraged him to join him in his practice: “My friend had a couple of



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little seismic
dance company
photo by Pak Han



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manual Leica cameras. I would play with them and he would look at my pictures and go, 'Wow. You know Han these are actually good.' That planted a seed in my head. I started to explore photography seriously from that point on, got myself a Canon DSLR, a large camera with a big lens. I started to wander around taking photos in the South Bay. I got hooked. It was a weird feeling, like grabbing a jacket off a rack and it fits perfectly. That was the feeling I got with photography." For ten years, Han juggled 12-hour shifts at his day job, with 3-4 days a week devoted to photography, two full-time jobs: "I wasn't getting any rest."

Despite being digital photographs, Han's black and white pictures remind me of the photos I grew up with; they have a grainy feel that evokes timelessness and my father's basement dark room: "I strive for that. I don't like digital photos to look like digital photos." When Han had an opportunity to go to Japan in 2008 and 2009—the first time for a Star Wars convention (he's a huge fan), the second time to see the person he met on the first trip—he took his camera with him. He quickly started getting lost on purpose, just taking photos: "It was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. It was meditative. Being in that zone, just with my camera, it gave me this amazing euphoric feeling."

When he came back to California, he showed his photos to renowned Bay Area-based actor, dancer, choreographer, director Erika Chong Shuch. Shuch and Han have known each other all their lives—Han's father introduced Shuch's parents to each other in Korea—so they're "like cousins." She loved the photos and asked Han if he could take rehearsal photographs of a project she was embarking on in collaboration with Sean San Jose and Dennis Kim called *Sunday Will Come* at Intersection for the Arts: "I was hesitant because I felt like that wasn't my thing. But Erika knows how to convince me. She said, 'Hey, it's just like street photography! You're just going to be there and take these candid photos of us during rehearsal.' I agreed under two conditions: one, complete freedom, no art direction, and two, I'm shooting in black and white." Pleased with his work, Shuch asked



Erika Chong Shuch Performance Project / photo by Pak Han

him to take promotional photos, then production photos: "I had no training in production photography. When I showed up, there were people in the seats, the lights kept changing. I just remember running around everywhere with my camera, sweat coming down my forehead and getting into my eyes. I was constantly changing the settings of my camera to adjust to the lighting and the movement. When everything was over Erika and Sean asked how it went. I didn't really know. It was a blur. I picked maybe a couple dozen shots I thought were good and gave it to them. I didn't hear anything right away. But after a few days, they told me they loved them."

When Han is shooting a live production, he is all over the place: "Before I take a job with any theater, I explain to them that I need to get up close. Instead of capturing images from the point of view of the

audience, I want to capture a perspective the audience doesn't have. And I want it to be cinematic." Cinematic is a good word for Han's photography, both street and performance. His photographs tell a story unfolding in time, in that split-second moment after he sees an interesting composition and before he presses the shutter; the photographer recognizes something emergent and a whole universe of change happens in that moment. That's why it's not quite right to call photography a technology of capture, and why photographers like Han seem to have an uncanny way of attuning to their environment.

Han has worked long time with Shuch as well as with several Bay Area theater and dance companies such as Nina Haft & Co, Paufve Dance, Anna Halprin, Crowded Fire, Dohee Lee, inkBoat, and Shotgun Players: "I didn't want to show up and just take

photographs, I wanted to have that collaborative relationship. Once they are okay with that, I would work with them." This agreement doesn't necessarily guarantee a continuous relationship. Han needs to connect as personalities and artistically: "I have a very special relationship with just a handful of people where we can explore ideas and conjure up imageries and visual concepts."

Han's experiences in Japan cemented his passion for street photography. A street photographer strives to remain unseen. With the help of the camera as protective barrier, a street photographer retains their anonymity. This mode of being in the world suited Han: "With street photography you're trying to create something beautiful or interesting. But at the same time, I have to be mindful that I'm taking photos of strangers in the street. How do I do it without sacrificing art and without crossing that line of being creepy?"



Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes* / photo by Pak Han

And that's what both dance writing and dance photography have to offer—an opportunity to dwell on an image, to inhabit the image as a divining rod that locates and reactivates the dance.

It's funny that Han used the word "creepy." When I shared with a writing class that my dad used to take photos of sunbathers on the beach in Seaside Heights, NJ, someone in the class said, "Creepy." I'd never thought of it as creepy because the photographs always reflected something of compositional interest rather than a lascivious glance toward a woman in a bikini: "I didn't really think about that either until last year when some of my photos were featured on the website Bored Panda. People started making comments. Some wonderful comments and few, 'Oh, that's creepy!' That's when I started going, Oh my God, there are people who are going to think that way. It affected the way I shoot now. Before I wasn't thinking about the woman looking beautiful or sexy when I was taking the photo. I was thinking about composition, lighting, the expression on her face. But after the Bored Panda experience, I went back to Japan and noticed that when I was taking photos I was very aware of that. It kind of put a leash on me a little bit. I don't know if it's good or not."

We are in a moment where we're being forced to become aware of these things and that's a net good for our society. As to whether this awareness makes art better or worse, who's to say? I think those are separate issues. I can't watch a Woody Allen movie anymore because of who I now understand him to be. His art is ruined for me because I have a new lens on it. I'm pretty sure I'd laugh as hard now at *Love and Death* as I did before the revelations about his conduct. That's partly why I won't watch it again. I feel like my laughter would make me complicit. Some artists are interested in this challenge, others feel like it's an affront to their creative liberty. Han sees it as a period of figuring things out.

Han's dance photographs are interesting art objects in and of themselves. They respond to the dance and in so doing become part of the dance: "I am looking for something that has a story of its own in each shot. Rather than seeing a photo and recognizing the image as a dance, I want the viewer to really dwell on the image." And that's what both dance writing and dance photography have to offer—an opportunity to dwell on an image, to inhabit the image as a divining rod that locates and reactivates the dance: "One of my objectives is to get people curious about the performance with just one or handful of photos. I want to create a visceral, metaphorical, sublime image that people can look at, wonder what it's about, and want to know more about the artist and the work."

Han and I agree that photography is not an art form of capture but rather of creation. Like a piece of dance writing, a dance photograph is not a corollary to the dance but rather an actuality that exists in conversation with the dance, enriching the conversation around it. The dance photograph helps tell the story of the dance. It's part of the dance's archive not unlike the bodies that hold the memory of movement in their tissue. Pak Han and his camera join the bodies in motion and in stillness, in the street and in the theater, in the dance.

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.



Tips to Consider When Hiring and Working with a Photographer

by **KEGAN MARLING**

A KNOWLEDGEABLE DANCE photographer with an eye for composition and the ability to capture the right moment can be instrumental in documenting, promoting and sharing your work. Here are some tips and considerations when looking to work with a fine-art photographer:

1. Choosing a photographer and negotiating your agreement:

- The best approach to finding a photographer is to ask your network and colleagues. It's a quick and easy way to learn about a photographer's work ethic and personality. Alternately, check out the photo credits for dance images you love and keep track of them (I like to peruse the *In Dance* calendar). You'll probably notice your eye keeps gravitating towards particular photographers over time.
- Before hiring anyone, be sure to review their portfolio closely to get a feel for their style. Every photographer has a different approach to framing and editing, and it's best to find someone whose style suits your work. Do they often shoot close up or very wide? Do they fill the frame or leave lots of open space? Are their images active or statuesque? Saturated in color or muted? Architectural? Emotive?
- Photographers are usually very clear about their rates and what you should expect to receive. In addition to their fee, be sure to go over these things in advance: arrival time and anticipated length of the shoot, how and when files will be delivered, image resolution size, cancellation policy, your usage rights, and if there are any additional post-processing costs. If the fee is outside of your range, you can politely let them know it's too high for your budget, but don't expect them to haggle over a price. Most performance

photographers are already offering artists the lowest rate they can afford.

- A promotional shoot can be a great way to test out working with a new photographer. You get marketing materials and a chance to see how they work, while providing the photographer an opportunity to learn about the work you're making.
 - Plan to hire a photographer 2-3 months in advance when possible, especially if your event is only for one weekend.
- ## 2. Preparing for a shoot:
- In general, capturing a show can be high-stress – there's one chance for the photographer to catch the action and they usually haven't seen the work in advance. Plus, they're constantly adjusting for lighting changes and fast-moving action! Consider the following to help them in advance of the shoot.
 - Talk them through a rough outline of the flow of the show, noting any sudden shifts in lighting or focus. For example, if you have a dark section that is immediately followed by bright strobe lights, identify something that happens on stage right before the change, so your photographer can anticipate it.
 - Your stage lighting will be the primary factor in what the photographer can capture. Some lighting may look fantastic on stage but appear blown out or unrenderable on camera. Dim lighting is the obvious culprit, but other big challenges are deeply saturated colors (particularly red and blue), high contrast lighting (like bright spotlights), and mottled lighting. Talk to your photographer in advance about your lighting choices and they can help identify what might not capture well on camera. You may want to consider photographing those sections separately

and adjusting the light levels for camera. At the very least, try to set aside time before the run to shoot a couple moments in the appropriate lighting so the photographer can try out different camera settings.

- Before the shoot, take a moment to consider the background of your dance and look for anything that might show up unwanted in an image. The camera often picks up small details, and you can greatly improve the quality of photos by doing some simple things like hiding a cable running across the back or changing bright spike marks on the floor with colors similar to the floor color.
- If you know the images are for a specific future purpose, or that you would prefer the photographer focus on a specific person, be clear about these requests in advance. For example, if I know a company is planning to use the images for a postcard, I'll often shoot leaving plenty of empty space around the action so that it's easy for someone to add text later.
- Photographing a dress rehearsal can offer great flexibility for moving around the space, potentially allowing your photographer to capture more compelling angles and a more diverse set of images. And you won't have to worry about camera noise or blocking audience members. If your photographer won't be able to move during the performance, it's best to discuss with them in advance about their location during the show.
- If your budget allows, consider hiring them to photograph two performances. Having seen the work once already, the photographer will be better equipped to capture quick moments, try different angles, and compensate for lighting issues.

3. What should you expect afterwards:

- Don't expect your favorite moments to get captured. We're doing our best to show off your work and capture the highlights, but sometimes bodies move too fast or a shape that looks great in 3D looks lifeless in 2D. If there's something you absolutely must have captured, you should talk with your photographer about carving out time before the performance.
- Editing takes time and every artist has a different process. Be sure to negotiate in advance if you have a specific deadline when you need some or all of the images.
- Most photographers will deliver edited images only. You shouldn't expect to receive unedited (raw) images unless you have specifically discussed this in advance. Photographers are usually happy to do additional touch-ups or editing for a fee.
- And finally, please **always credit your photographer!** Photo credits directly impact a photographer's ability to find work and are an important acknowledgement of their artistry. Many photographers will not work with someone a second time if they notice a consistent failure to credit. Please be considerate and acknowledge the work and artistry of your photographer!

KEGAN MARLING is a San Francisco documentary and lifestyle photographer focused on queer communities, dance, and body/sex-positivity. His work has been in publications including the *SF Chronicle*, *SF Weekly*, *Têtu*, and *Drummer Magazine*, and is part of the permanent collection at SF General Hospital. He has created two short films in collaboration with playwright Brian Thorstenson for the National Queer Arts Festival, and is currently working on a photo essay on queer mythologies. keganmarling.org



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The Draw(back) of Awarding Achievement

by BHUMI PATEL

Contributor note: Unattributed quotes were shared with me anonymously as research for this piece.

Around this time every year we are inundated with being told what the “best” of the last year was across performing art genres: best actor, best film, best cinematography, best album, best production, best choreography, best white director co-opting the stories of BIQTPOC....you get the idea. And here we are, at another award season another outcry over #OscarsSoWhite. Yet another wash of disappointment and exasperation at the blatant and acute racism that permeates award shows from the Grammys to the Izzies and everything in between.

Every year we see that the system is broken. Only men were nominated for the 2020 Oscar for Best Director. Only white choreographers were nominated for the 2020 Isadora Duncan Dance Awards (Izzies) in Outstanding Achievement in Choreography and in Outstanding Achievement in Restaging/Revival/Reconstruction. This is not unique to 2020. This is how it has always been. We have consistently seen that white adequacy will be awarded for achievement in “regular” or “default” categories but that minority exceptionalism will only be recognized through “special achievement.” Most people I asked said that they didn’t believe that award shows are serving the communities they are meant to represent.

On a large scale, the 2020 Oscars nominations saw major categories dismissing the work of women and people of color in a huge way. Academy member Stephen King, who defended the (very male, very white) nominations, tweeted: “For me, the diversity issue — as it applies to individual actors and directors, anyway — did not come up. That said...,” followed with “...I would never consider diversity in matters of art. Only quality. It seems to me that to do otherwise would be wrong.” This sidelining and skirting around white supremacy is at the heart of the massive problem with the awards industry. Compared to a committee of 20 or so individuals that serve on the Izzies, the Academy with a voting body of around 1,000 people seems huge, but on the scale of the film industry I have to wonder: weren’t there probably around 1,000 people on one set of one episode of the last season of *Game of Thrones*?

We are in a time of contradictory desires — one to lose ourselves in the magic of glitz and glam and one to create equity in the performing arts. Diversity is a buzzword everywhere right now, and award shows from the Oscars to the Izzies are being everything from lightly encouraged to aggressively boycotted in attempts to realize diversity in both nominations and wins. But it has been disheartening to see how little that talk has been turned into action. One person I spoke to suggested that these shows “make incremental changes for Artists of Color but not necessarily changes that are sweeping equitable practices.” They went on to say, “tokenism is still widely practiced from the makeup of the panelists to the nominees, and despite the illusion of diversity, these power structures remain asymmetrical.”

To me, awards like the Oscars, Golden Globes, Emmys, and even the Bessies and the Izzies reinforce an illegitimate scarcity mindset, and a harmful sense of competition — that there are not enough resources, enough donors, enough actors/dancers/performers for us to keep doing the work we love to do. No one is making films or albums or performance works because we believe that it is an easy and guaranteed path toward wealth in a capitalist society. We love what we do, and even if we have a million reasons for doing this artistic work, somewhere in there is a care for the work that is being made. This belief in scarcity, that there isn’t enough for everything, is harmful and damaging to our community.

Further, the awards fail to fully recognize the disparity in resources when comparing nominees. One person I spoke to asked, “Is it fair to assess whether a ballet with a 3 million dollar budget is ‘better’ than a community-based ethnic dance with unpaid dancers?” I don’t think it is. Another added that this is particularly poignant because, “committee members have no responsibility to attend performances equitably.” Yet another shared that they believe award culture “continues to perpetuate classism and racism,” and that they feel, “the whitest and the wealthiest people give awards to their other white, wealthy friends.”

If we know the system doesn’t work, why do we buy into the awards system? Why, when we could have democratized, internet-enabled ways to suss out the “good” from the “better,” do we still seek affirmation from problematic institutions? Why do we believe that volunteer panels or Academy members or Guilds possess a truth unavailable to the mere mortals in the audience when we could turn to cold hard results: audience scores, box office returns, Google searches, critics’ views?

For many, award season represents validation of their work, recognition of their service to their community, a title to put on grant applications. For some, “awards validate aesthetics.” According to research by Jennifer Guttman, PsyD, studies suggest that public approval fulfills a basic human need. “We crave validation because as social beings we feel comfort in a ‘group think’ mentality,” she says. “It’s reassuring to believe that other people think the way we do because it gives us a feeling that we’re ‘right’ about our choices and behaviors.” Something happens more deeply, too, when you watch an awards show. She goes on to say, “The Oscars are exciting and entertaining because they reinforce our belief that people thrive on external reinforcement.” Similarly, one person I spoke with shared, “the thread of continuity that I see between largely publicized events of the Oscars/Golden Globes and smaller communities of the Izzies/Bessies is one that aims to bring communities of artists together and reaffirm our importance as artists to the world.”

Perhaps there is a bit of nostalgia that keeps us coming back, too. We remember Patricia Arquette demanding that we close the gender pay gap. We remember Viola Davis quoting Harriet Tubman and reminding us that “the only thing that separates women of color from anyone else is opportunity.” We remember hearing about Hattie McDaniel, the first African American woman to be nominated and win Best Supporting Actress in 1940. We remember Sacheen Littlefeather taking the stage on behalf of Marlon Brando in 1973, and we remember Halle Berry being the first (and to this date, only) African-American to win Best Actress.

We remember Frances McDormand impassionately demanding “inclusion riders” for the industry. We remember Leo DiCaprio imploring all of us to act on climate change. And, we remember Meryl Streep calling out the bully in the White House reminding us that, “Disrespect invites disrespect, violence incites violence. And when the powerful use their position to bully others, we all lose,” in a speech that still brings me to tears.

But more than that we remember the moments that we spend with our communities. Maybe you’ve gathered with friends to watch these shows and eat tiny hors d’œuvres. Maybe you’ve danced at the Bessies after party with friends that you only get to see once a year. Maybe you’ve gotten to hug a friend after they won their first Emmy. Or maybe, like me, you remember your mom pulling out sparkly dress-up clothes and bottles of sparkling apple juice and setting up TV dinner trays in the living room so that you and your sisters could watch the Oscars and cheer when actors you dreamed of meeting won. And maybe that nostalgia is what keeps many of us coming back.

So where can we go from here? I don’t believe I have the power to change national and international awards organizations, but I do believe in the power of our community to demand change to the current structure of community-based awards. One person I spoke with suggested that, “we need to trouble the singular aesthetic standard (White Euro-Western aesthetics), and I don’t think the Izzies, as currently configured, does that. It doesn’t matter how diverse the committee is if the decision-making structure

is inadequate.” If we do want to honor what we view as achievement, we need to evolve, respond, and shift to “advocate for the field.” We need our “arts communities to dedicate themselves to diversity and antiracism.” That work is not easy, but it is necessary.

Maybe we watch and attend award shows to see people dressed up and vicariously experience their anticipation and excitement of feeling validated, something box office numbers and survey scores can’t provide. Maybe we have to stop watching the whole charade and figure out how to redirect our understanding of success and validation. Maybe we don’t have to do anything at all. Award shows are becoming less and less relevant every year, with viewership dropping dramatically with each passing award season. Or maybe through intentional antiracism work we will begin to bend that moral arc of which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke towards representation.

BHUMI B. PATEL is a queer, desi artist/activist creating multidisciplinary dancetheater with an intersectional feminist lens to unpack her inner landscape where she is brown, queer, working class, and a woman. As a dancer, choreographer, curator, educator, writer, and historian, she works from a trauma informed, social justice oriented perspective. Patel teaches at West Valley College, Lone Mountain Children’s Center, and Shawl-Anderson Dance Center. Patel’s work has been presented at SAFE-house Arts, LEVYsalon, Shawl Salon, max10, Summer Performance Festival, RAWdance’s Concept Series, and the Queering Dance Festival. Patel has curated “fem(me)” since 2017 and has been published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Life as a Modern Dancer*.



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MAR 2020

calendar

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



Gamelan Sekar Jaya & ShadowLight Productions, Mar 14-15 / photo by Lynda Roti

Margaret Jenkins Dance Lab, SF

Experience celebrated dance artist Merián Soto (Puerto Rico/Philadelphia) as she shares solo work from her past repertoire as well as a new work developed with 15 Bay Area dancers. This performance is part of Encounters Over 60, a program of the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company, supporting the artistry and experiences of dance elders. Thu, Mar 5, 7-9pm, pay what you can mjdc.org/encounters

Noorani Dance Z Space, SF

Ruthless politics, female power and Kathak converge in *The Forgotten Empress*. This solo

performance will feature Farah Yasmeen Shaikh portraying all the characters, both male and female, complete with live music. Thu-Fri, Mar 5-6, 7:30-9pm, \$35-\$60 nooranidance.com

project agora/Kara Davis DZINE Gallery, SF

Manuelito Biag, Tristan Ching, Kara Davis, Nol Simonse, and Victor Talledos have collaborated to create an immersive evening-length, installation work. The performance will take place in an intimate setting to immerse the audience in explorations of human connection and intimacy. Fri, Mar 6, 7-8pm, \$25-\$35 project-agera.com

Joffrey Ballet Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley

They continue their five-year Berkeley residency by returning with the Bay Area premiere of a recent piece by ballet master Nicolas Blanc that was developed on the Berkeley campus two seasons ago. Fri-Sat, Mar 6-7, 8pm; Sun, Mar 8, 3pm, \$42-\$148 calperformances.org

Two-Spirit Performance Festival CounterPulse, SF

First contemporary Two-Spirit Performance Festival in Yelamu (San Francisco), that will feature local, national and international Two-Spirit Indigenous artists. Festival evening performances range from traditional forms to experimental performance art, dance, and drag. Fri-Sat, Mar 6-7, 7pm; Sun, Mar 8, 5pm, \$20-\$30 counterpulse.org

Stephanie Unger & Artists Studio Azul, Berkeley

A three-evening festival of Bay Area (and beyond) artists, presenting work about womxn. Fri-Sat, Mar 6-7, 8pm; Sun, Mar 8, 7pm, \$10-\$20 stephanieungerdance.com

Vishwa Shanthi Cubberly Community Center, Palo Alto

Inaugural performance of Vishwa Shanthi's new series, *Samarpanam: A Dedication to Art*, Bharatanatyam dance in its traditional and pure form in an intimate chamber setting for connoisseurs and serious students to enjoy. Sat, Mar 7, 4-5:30pm, \$30 vishwashanthi.com

Fog Beast Headland Center for the Arts, Sausalito

Multi-generational and participatory, *These Lines Are Living* brings attention to how our bodies, communities, and governing institutions interact with and conceptualize shorelines in a time of accelerating climatic and social change. Sat-Sun, Mar 7-8, 2pm, \$25-\$30 fogbeast.com

Unruly Body Tanztheater/ KJ Dahlaw Shawl-Anderson Dance Center, Berkeley

Converging Passages features works by Chelsea Boyd Brown and collaborators, Qilo Matzen, & Unruly Body Tanztheater along with works by Midwest dance artists Kathleen Hickey and Renee Murray. Sat, Mar 7, 8pm; Sun, Mar 8, 5pm, \$20 artful.ly/converging-passages



LINES Ballet BFA Program, Apr 3-4 / photo by Steve-Disenhof



Tiny Dance Film Festival, *Crashing Waves* dir. by Emma Gilbertson, Mar 28 / photo courtesy of artist

RAWdance

ODC Theater, SF

Triple Take is a trio of new works by RAWdance's three co-artistic directors: Wendy Rein, Ryan Smith and Katie Wong. An adaption of the Surrealist game of Exquisite Corpse looks to inject a dose of surprise and unpredictability into the bicoastal choreographic collaboration. Thu-Sat, Mar 12-14, 8pm; Sun, Mar 15, 3pm, \$25-\$60 odc.dance/tripletake

SFSU University Dance Theatre

San Francisco State University Little Theatre

The 16-student dance ensemble performs work from guest choreographer dana e. fitchett, as well as new work from faculty choreographers Wendy Diamond, ArVejon Jones, and Ray Tadio. Thu-Sat, Mar 12-14, 7:30pm; Sun, Mar 15, 2pm, \$8-\$20 theatredance.sfsu.edu

Dorrance Dance

Zellerbach Playhouse, Berkeley

With 13 tap dancers and one acoustic bass player, Michelle Dorrance's SOUNDspace strips tap dance down to its most raw basics—movement as pure music. Without the trappings of ornate set pieces or flashy costumes, Dorrance's company explores the unique setting and acoustics of Zellerbach Playhouse. Fri-Sat, Mar 13-14, 8pm; Sun, Mar 15, 3pm, \$68 calperformances.org

Helen Wicks Works

Project Artuad's Space 124, SF

Click Tracks, a new show inspired by the history of film scoring and newsreels. In collaboration with rigger Benjy Young, aerial dancers will perform on a 4-story tightwire that provides a frame of time and space that reconstructs sheet music, offering multi-directional timelines. Fr-Sat, Mar 13-14, 8pm; Sun, Mar 15, 3pm, \$30 helenwicks.com

Gamelan Sekar Jaya / ShadowLight Productions

Presidio Theatre, SF

World premiere of *Drupadi*, a woman-centered retelling of the Mahabharata's central arc, as presented in cinematic shadow in celebration of



Kathy Mata Ballet, Mar 15 / photo by Jennifer V. Zee

Women's History Month. Written by playwright Zara Houshmand, with narration by Brenda Wong Aoki, and shadow master Larry Reed. Sat, Mar 14, 2:30pm and 7:30pm; Sun, Mar 15, 2:30pm, \$30-\$100 gsj.org

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo

Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley

Statuesque, glamorous male dancers in the iconic, fictional roles of prima ballerinas, the Trocks are an internationally adored cultural phenomenon and have performed their sophisticated form of ballet parody, en travesti, for more than 40 years. Sat, Mar 14, 8pm; Sun, Mar 15, 3pm, \$38-\$98 calperformances.org

Min Yoon / Daria Garina / em(body) dance project

SAFEhouse Arts, SF

Themes of collective despair, truth and meaning, and generational refugees presented by artists Min Yoon, Daria Garina, and em(body) dance project. Sat, Mar 14, 8pm; Sun, Mar 15, 7pm; \$10-\$20 safehousearts.org

Kathy Mata Ballet

Alonzo King LINES Dance Center, SF

The End of Winter Dance Celebration will engage with premieres of new material incorporating modern, lyrical fusion, contemporary, musical theater, character dance styles, and more, with live accompaniment. Sun, Mar 15, 3:30pm, FREE kathymataballet.org

Los Lupeños Juvenil

School of Arts and Culture at the Mexican Heritage Plaza, San Jose

Tardeada IX is an annual folklórico dance concert by dancers aged 10-15 years old. The presentation is under the direction of Samuel Cortezin. Sun, Mar 15, 2-3:30pm, \$15 loslupenos.org

Bay Area Ensemble Consortium

Cal State University East Bay, Hayward

Exploring the intersections of dance, theater, music, and community activism, followed by a discussion about Ensemble Theater by a diverse group of Bay Area Ensemble Consortium members. Thu, Mar 19, 4:15-6pm, FREE csueastbay.edu

Rhythmix Cultural Works and Crosspulse

Rhythmix Cultural Works, Alameda

BODY MUSIC/East Bay Concert is a showcase of all-body musician/dancers curated by Keith Terry. Body Music - clapping, snapping, stepping and vocalizing - is music you can see, dance you can hear - likely the oldest music on the planet. Fri, Mar 20, 8pm, \$25-\$30 crosspulse.com



Bay Area Ensemble Consortium, CSUEB Inclusive Interdisciplinary Ensemble, Mar 19 / photo by Garvin Tso

*afrikawedance

Ashkenaz Music and Dance Community Center, Berkeley

We Dance Because introduces three young girls who dreamed of being dancers. African dance becomes their source of healing, strength, and empowerment. Sat, Mar 21, 7:30-9:30pm, \$20 afrikawedance.com

Mark Foehringer Dance Project|SF

Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, SF

Third annual season of *Alice in Wonderland*, Foehringer's own personal interpretation of Alice as a heroine who faces challenges and solves them. Foehringer's *Alice* is a fearless character with girl power. Sat-Sun, Mar 21-22, 11am and 2pm, \$20.50-\$42.50 mfdpsf.org/alice

RAW Presents A Pulso Dance Company / BauerWorks / Brenda Perdue / Srivastava

SAFEhouse Arts, SF A Pulso Dance Company

Themes of gender, love, and betrayal presented by artists A Pulso Dance Company, BauerWorks, Brenda Perdue, and Anumpama Srivastava. Sat, Mar 21, 8pm; Sun, Mar 22, 7pm; \$10-\$20 safehousearts.org

Niosha International Conservatory of Arts

Palace of Fine Arts, SF

Nowruz/Norooz is a 3000 year old tale of ancient Zoroastrian soul-cleansing rituals, good luck charms and the beauty of the *Table of the Seven S's*. Sat, Mar 21, 7pm; Sun, Mar 22, 4pm, \$45-\$200 nicart.org



Mark Foehringer Dance Project, Mar 21-22 / photo by Matt Haber

MAR 2020

calendar



SAFEhouse RAW, A Pulso Dance Company, Mar 21-22 / photo by Kyle Adler

Rebecca Morris & Dancers Shawl-Anderson Dance Center, Berkeley

World premiere of *Upon waking, it has no name*, a quartet exploring mental health, social interaction, and what it means to be human. Saturdays, Mar 21 and 28, 8pm; Sundays, Mar 22 and 29, 7:30pm, \$20-\$30 rebeccamorrisdance.org

The Isadora Duncan Dance Awards Ceremony

Brava Theater, SF
This year the Isadora Duncan Dance Awards Committee will celebrate 34 years of honoring local dance artists by acknowledging their outstanding achievements in dance. Join us in celebrating the nominees, awardees, special guests! Mon, Mar 23, 6pm, **FREE** izzies-sf.org

ODC/Dance

YBCA Theater, SF
ODC/Dance, San Francisco's internationally acclaimed contemporary dance company, is pleased to present *Dance Downtown*, its 49th Home Season featuring two programs of bold and bracing choreography. Thu-Sat, Mar 26-28, 8pm; Sun, Mar 29, 5pm; Thu-Sat, Apr 2-4, 8pm; Sun, Apr 5, 5pm, \$30-\$80 odc.dance

IncivilitySF

EXIT Theatre, SF
IncivilitySF is an irreverent showcase of politically-inspired work from San Francisco's underground. Artists working with themes of social justice, community-empowerment, and political awakening try out new work/work-in-progress in front of a live audience. Fri, Mar 27, 8-10pm, **FREE** facebook.com

Rotunda Dance Series presents Mini Mix'd

San Francisco City Hall
The Rotunda Dance Series brings many of the

Bay Area's most celebrated dance companies to SF City Hall for free monthly noon-time performances and is presented by Dancers' Group and World Arts West. Mini Mix'd is an all-female youth company between 12 to 17 years old, presenting hip hop, club and street styles. Fri, Mar 27, 12pm, **FREE** dancersgroup.org/presents/rotunda

PUSH Dance Company

Bayview Opera House, SF
World premiere of *The Motley Experiment*, Raissa Simpson's evening-length, multi-media exploration of Jazz Age painter Archibald Motley, featuring 12 dancers, an original score created and performed live by Idris Ackamoor and The Pyramids and a digital landscape. Fri, Mar 27, 7:30pm; Sat-Sun, Mar 28-29, 2pm, \$15-\$50 pushdance.org

Tiny Dance Film Festival

Roxie Theater, SF
Short dance films from across the globe. TDFP prioritizes films that stretch into new territory, challenge dominant narratives, and embrace brevity. Sat, Mar 28, 4:40pm & 6pm, \$10-\$25 detourdance.com/tdff

The New Ballet

Hammer Theatre Center, San Jose
Fast Forward provides local and national emerging choreographers to experiment, featuring choreography by Ben Needham-Wood, Laura Burton, Mads Eriksen, Naomi Sailors, Heather Cooper, and Dalia Rawson. Sat, Mar 28, 7-8:30, \$10-\$25 newballet.com

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley
Artistic director Robert Battle has cultivated choreographers exploring themes of hope, sorrow, joy, and resilience. Tue-Fri, Mar 31-Apr 3, 8pm; Sat, Apr 4, 2pm and 8pm; Sun, Apr 3, 3pm, \$40-\$145 (prices subject to change) calperformances.org



PUSH Dance, Mar 27-29 / photo by Matt Haber



Two-Spirit Performance Festival, Mar 6-8 / photo courtesy of artist

CounterPulse: Edge Residency 2020

CounterPulse, SF
WITH blends extensive physical exploration of movement beyond signularity and nightlife for a multi-generational queer phenomenon. *These Teeth* draws on personal history and refuses to censor the female voice and body. Thu-Sat, Apr 2-4 & 9-11, 8pm, \$20-\$35 counterpulse.org

RAW Presents eMotion Arts Dance Company

SAFEhouse Arts, SF
eMotion Arts presents *Sombro*, a collaborative work that is meant to open up conversation about mental health and destigmatize individual and collective experiences. Fri-Sat, Apr 3-4, 8pm, \$10-\$20 safehousearts.org

LINES Ballet BFA Program Dominican University of CA's Angelico Concert Hall, San Rafael

Join the LINES Ballet | BFA at Dominican students as they premiere four original works by Kara Davis, Gregory Dawson, Dexandro Montalvo, and Laura O'Malley to close out the school year. Fri, Apr 3, 7pm; Sat, Apr 4, 3pm, \$10 linesballet.org



Rhythmix Cultural Works, Mar 20 / photo by Mike Melnyk



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ODC/Dance Presents

Dance Downtown

March 26-April 5, 2020
Blue Shield of California Theater at YBCA

odc.dance/downtown

"Sexy, intelligent performance power!"
- San Francisco Chronicle

odc

Photo by RJ Muna



music dance theater
Cal Performances
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

2019/20 SEASON

The Joffrey Ballet

CHRISTOPHER WHEELDON
Comedia

STEPHANIE MARTINEZ
Bliss! (music: Stravinsky)
(California Premiere)

NICOLAS BLANC
Beyond the Shore
(music: Mason Bates) (Bay Area Premiere,
Cal Performances Co-commission)

JUSTIN PECK
The Times Are Racing
(music: Dan Deacon)



Mar 6-8
ZELLERBACH HALL

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo

The Trocks have helped bring gay culture and drag arts to the American mainstream through savagely funny satire married with seriously stunning ballet.

Program
Swan Lake, Act II (Tchaikovsky)
Pas de Deux or *Modern Work* to be announced
Le Grand Pas de Quatre (Pugni)
Walpurgisnacht (Gounod)

"The Trocks prove how parody and virtuosic technique work in glittering tandem."
—The New York Times

Mar 14 & 15
ZELLERBACH HALL



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Robert Battle, artistic director
Matthew Rushing, associate artistic director

Programs will include classics from the Ailey repertoire plus Bay Area premieres by **Aszure Barton, Camille A. Brown, Donald Byrd, and Jamar Roberts.**

Mar 31-Apr 5
ZELLERBACH HALL



Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch

Palermo Palermo

The late Pina Bausch's 1989 masterpiece observes—through a series of vignettes by turns somber and surreal—the daily rituals of a people capable of both resonant beauty and chilling brutality.

"Every single one of them is magnificent, and wonderfully alive."
—Critical Dance

Apr 24-26
ZELLERBACH HALL

calperformances.org/tickets

Season Sponsor: **WELLS FARGO**



GOING BICOASTAL: RAWdance Does a Triple Take

by SARAH CHENOWETH

FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, under the banner of RAWdance, Wendy Rein and Ryan T. Smith have been teaching and producing work in San Francisco. Their leadership in the city swelled with the onset of curatorial projects like ChoreoFest (in partnership with Yerba Buena Gardens Festival) and the CONCEPT series (produced biannually at the SF War Memorial and Performing Arts Center). Recently, and at an apex of influence in the company's history, Rein and Smith moved to New York's Hudson Valley.

Seem surprising? Smith shares that the motivations were personal and professional. Both directors are from the East Coast and felt the pull of their aging families. Smith also admits the practicality of the move: "We were slaves to rent control here. We want a vegetable garden, and I want a puppy," he grins. "We were looking at the reality and creativity of not just our company, but also our lives."

They brainstormed about the company's existence and structure. "We really wanted to expand in a way that felt authentic," Rein's eyes are earnest. "It was important to have someone here, on the ground in San Francisco, to continue to see everyone else's work, be tied to our dancers, stay face to face with collaborators, etc." So, in a clever plan to keep the company alive and maintain its potency, they brought on Katerina Wong as a third artistic director. Wong is a long-time RAWdance collaborator and dancer. Since 2012, she has been freelancing, doing arts marketing, choreography, consulting, and dancing in the Bay. Now she is fully immersed in this single, bustling organization as its West Coast lead.

It's pretty ideal. This way they can enjoy the garden and dog without losing the fruits of their art-making labor. It allows them to "have our cake and eat it too," Rein concedes. Wong, apt and effervescent, reassures the decision, insisting "the personal sacrifice [for art] doesn't have to be life long. There are solutions to think of and test out together." RAWdance is treating the company like you might treat a timeworn choreographic habit—breaking rules, welcoming alternate endings, collaborating throughout the process.

If you're thinking of replicating their model, take note that RAWdance had over a decade to "hone a strong artistic voice and develop the company's infrastructure. Ryan and I ran it from the start as a duo, so we were already used to joint navigation and negotiation," Rein clarifies. "Being a good communicator is so important in general, but especially when you're sharing leadership." She advocates that companies make adaptations based specifically on their circumstances and makeup.

In this case, Wong is joining the helm of a ship already at full speed. It's a delicate and different challenge than directing a company at its nascency. There are expectations in place, relationships to maintain, and artists relying on quality resources. Wong thanks her years of free-lancing as solid training for this multi-hat position. She's not shying away from the density of the task: "The whole first year was a massive learning experience and a joy... I am working every spare hour I can find, trying to retrain and retool myself to become even more generative." Wong's brows

rise as she beams, "I am holding on for dear life a bit... wanting to match and surpass the goals I set for myself. It's a dream moment."

The reformed RAWdance is presenting *Triple Take* March 12-15 at ODC. It will be a mixed bag, intentionally. In its total body of work, RAWdance has bounced from making dance outside and inside of theaters, from emotional narratives to abstracted movement studies. *Triple Take* will highlight that miscellany because the show has no specific "theme". The subject of each work is incomparable to the next—ancient Chinese medicine, digital identity/exhaust, and a game of choreography mash-up.

Wong will mount the final development of *The Healer*, a work that's been in progress for over a year. She was compelled by her aunt, who studied acupuncture and energy healing in Beijing and practiced for decades in New Zealand and the US. She passed away unexpectedly in 2018. Her death illuminated new pathways within Wong's family, and a curiosity about ancient healing practices in Wong. In the obscurity of her grief, Wong stepped into *The Healer*.

Much of Wong's choreographic inspira-

It's a tricky assignment — bringing an idea so far from the body back into the body.

tion comes from having studied cultural anthropology at Princeton: "anthropology holds in a big bowl all the angles and perspectives of every story and experience: food, culture, history, ancestry, movement, art... the philosophical, economical, social, and psychological." Her anthropological inclination certainly dwells in this work. Through conversation, writing and research, she and the dancers have tried to more fully understand qi, the meridians, the five phases, yin and yang (and the fact that they can't exist without each other but are constantly in conflict), and other ancient wisdoms that previously baffled Wong's Western viewpoint.

The Healer operates as the corporeal arm of her inquiry into Chinese medicine. It soothes the dancers, and it aims to soothe the audience. Fully considering holistic experiences, Wong and her dancers hope the work will be multisensory in ODC theater—possibly offering optional smells and tastes so the audience can connect to their senses. Wong breathes in. She wants everyone in the room to "go on the ride with them, in a palpable way."

Diverging starkly from the realm of the somatic, *Shadow* will launch Rein and Smith's investigation into the realm of digital existence. *Shadow* wonders about parallel versions of ourselves that live inside the internet—selves born from Google searches, retail accounts, and banked data. "You can find a lot of philosophy now about social media platform identities in conflict with real life identity." Smith is mulling it over. "We're actually fascinated by the concept of something less self-defined—the data driven identity. Where does it live? How connected to me is that awkward costume I once looked up [online]?"

They are researching digital privacy by book, podcast, and almost daily New York Times spreads that relate somehow to the expanding issue. Rein even contacted multiple companies to obtain her recorded data history. Only two have provided any information, and only after requiring Rein to jump through some pesky hoops. "We are constantly monitored, and it's incredibly invasive. It all gets interpreted, even something you may have typed in wrong. How authentic is this version of you?" Rein, intrigued, tilts her head.

It's a topic that widens by the second, and with "so many threads to pull on, it's been hard to narrow it down. We keep coming back to the concept of an ever-narrowing feedback loop." Rein continues, "The way surveillance capitalism works (the term is taken from a book of the same name by Shoshana Zuboff) is that we feed our data, mostly unknowingly, to the corporate sector, which then models a version of us, and spits back tailored suggestions. These could be to buy things or to vote a certain way, etc. Then we take action, and the suggestions become more tailored. Every action we take helps feed this thing that grows better at controlling us. It's both terrifying and fascinating. And from a choreographer's perspective it's inherently about movement and power and evolving patterns."

Rein and Smith vent uncertainty about how to make something so undetectable and intangible (like the shadow of a life on the internet) feel real and tangible. It's a tricky assignment—bringing an idea so far from the body back into the body. Another question driving the choreography asks what parts of us are too intimate to be consciously "shared" and "tracked" online.

Finally, and cunningly, RAWdance has used the newly dispersed state of the company as a compositional tool. All three directors conspired to build a piece using the surrealist movement's "exquisite corpse" game. Working with their SF company of dancers, Rein and Smith started making the work in New York. They shared by video only the last 30 seconds of their creation with Wong. Wong used that 30 seconds to jumpstart the next section and sent only the last 30 seconds of her material back to Rein and Smith. This exchange of semi-blind creation developed the whole darn thing. The gap in their knowledge of the full material is satisfyingly analogous to the gap in their geographic relationship. Plus, it sounds super fun—a bit of concealing, a bit of revealing. The five dancers are the "keepers", the only ones able to see the entirety of the piece, for rehearsal needs.

Smith's lips quicken, "wildly different is good here. We don't need this to come back to a theme or something 'legible'." "Exactly," Rein affirms, "And regardless of whatever



Photo by Hillary Goidel

habits we all have, which will surely come out in our individual sections... the approach to this piece is inherently different." Via the piece, they have committed to listening and decision-making in a different way, as a triad. They are allowing themselves to see the full piece and make edits in the final weeks before the show, you know, for the show's sake. But this latest choreographic approach further mirrors the "emergent" attitude RAWdance is taking toward the company as a whole. They are thinking beyond prevailing structures, trying not to let a dance be forced into "a single sentence we wrote two years ago", and trying to allow the future of the organization to define itself as it goes.

After starving for space in San Francisco for many years, Rein and Smith have dreamt of starting a residency program in the Hudson Valley. Smith is eager; "space is actually abundant in the Hudson Valley. There are so many beautiful studios and barns that have already been converted, but are underutilized. We are considering how to activate those spaces and partner with others to make use of them. And of course try to bring some Bay folks out once we're established." Rein leans forward to spell it out: "The pipe dream is to have a more formalized East/West Coast exchange." Being in New York just a few months has already deepened their conversations with Jacob's Pillow and other organizations.

The addition of Wong and a second location bring RAWdance a real sense of momentum. All three directors are expressly receptive to sharing responsibility, artistic voice, and future choices. Wong is patently inspired by Rein and Smith, emphasizing her gratitude for stepping into a job with people who have been doing it for "so long and so well. There is so much trust and admiration." Equal esteem comes from Rein and Smith: "Conversely, Katie brings a distinct voice and a lot of energy. After being in this game a long time, the fresh perspective is huge." There are many avenues RAWdance could explore next, and it is clear they are still processing which they will follow. But, for now, SF dancers can continue to count on delicious popcorn at the CONCEPT Series and have a few more friends on the East Coast.

SARAH CHENOWETH is a dancer, teacher, and writer based in Oakland, CA. She teaches at Shawl Anderson Dance Center and writes for *Dance Teacher Magazine* and *DIYdancer*.



Photos by Elena Zhukova

community news

Dancers' Group Announces Fall 2019 CA\$H Dance Grant Recipients

\$49,000 in grants were awarded to seven artists and seven dance organizations in support of artistic projects—each grant award is \$3,500.

CA\$H supports artists from diverse cultural backgrounds and creative practices. Projects supported this round feature Bharatanatyam, dance theater, mothers who have Parkinson's disease and their adult children, Mexican Zapateado/Tap dance, Japanese and Japanese-American tradition of bon dances, traditional dance styles from Congo, Haiti, Guinea and Senegal and a film that will explore stories of trans-species survival.

The CA\$H program, which has been supporting dance-makers for the past 20 years, is funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and Grants for the Arts.

A peer panel of Bay Area artists met over two days to review **62 applications** — **38** from individual artists and **24** from organizations. The panelists who reviewed and awarded grants were Elizabeth Boubion, Irene Hsi, Sonia Pina, and Shahrzad.

The 14 Fall 2019 Dance grantees are:

Artists Awards

Arnaud Loubayi
Byb Chanel Bibene
Dazaun Soleyn
Jose e abad
Octavia Rose Hingle
Stephanie Hewett
Vanessa Sanchez

Dance Organizations

dNaga
Fog Beast
Guru Shradha
James Graham Dance Theatre
Samudra Dance Creations
Sharp & Fine
tinypistol

Read about the Fall 2019 Dance grantee projects
dancersgroup.org/funding/cash

CA\$H Dance Deadline Announced

Spring 2020 application is now open
Deadline Thu, Mar 26

CA\$H Dance is a granting program for individual artists and organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Spring round invites proposals that describe projects (creative activity) that can include performances, research, or an educational initiative and these activities must take place between July 1 and Dec 31, 2020.

Helgi Tomasson to receive 2020 San Francisco Arts Medallion

San Francisco Ballet Artistic Director and Principal Choreographer Helgi Tomasson will be presented with the 2020 San Francisco Arts Medallion for his outstanding leadership in the arts on April 23, 2020, at Saint Joseph's Arts Society in San Francisco. The San Francisco Arts Medallion was created in 2005 by the Museum of Performance + Design (MP+D) to recognize those individuals whose leadership, action, and generosity have benefited the cultural life of the San Francisco Bay Area.

mpdsf.org

Promote Your Summer Workshops

Deadline Mon, Mar 16

The annual May issue of *In Dance* featuring Summer Workshops gets distributed nationally to a readership of over 30,000 to highlight the abundance and dynamism of the Bay Area dance ecosystem.

dancersgroup.org/swg

Professional Learning for Dance Educators



Dance Equity & Inclusion Day

March 21, 9am-5pm, sliding scale \$20-185
Panel, advanced arts equity workshop, inclusive dance jam

Improvisation & Community

May 30, 1:30-5pm, \$135
Discover playful creative practices to inspire connection

Foundations in Dance Teaching Series

Level 1 July 27-31 | Level 2 Aug. 3-7, \$595 each
Grounding & revitalizing intensives to push your practice

additional workshops at lunadanceinstitute.org/professional-learning
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Kathak's Rhythmic Journey of Emotion

by MINA RIOS

WOMEN OF INFLUENCE from around the world have made significant achievements over the centuries; yet, the stories of their triumphs are often overlooked. Fortunately, proponents of some lesser told historic events dedicate themselves to bringing these stories to light through their art. In honor of International Women's Day this March Kathak artist Farah Yasmeen Shaikh, founder of Noorani Dance, will present *The Forgotten Empress*, the story of seventeenth century Empress Noor Jahan, the most influential Indian woman of her time. The forthcoming production conceived, choreographed, and danced by Shaikh, will be performed on two Bay Area stages in late February and early March with exuberant theatrics, live music, and multimedia. *The Forgotten Empress* first premiered in Lahore, Pakistan in 2017, in the very city where Empress Noor Jahan is laid to rest.

The Forgotten Empress is the fascinating true story of Empress Jahan, a rare, brilliant, and gifted empress of many talents. Empress Jahan attained unprecedented equal power and authority to her emperor husband for a time, essentially becoming the de facto ruler of the Mughal Empire while her husband presumably dealt with alcoholism and opium addiction.

Discerningly well versed in the complex gestural language of Kathak, after performing with Chitresh Das Dance Company for many years, Shaikh found her own artistic vision through stories of history, politics, and social relevance. She says, "I believe I'm drawn to these topics because they move me personally due to my family history and being a Muslim woman dancing this form, and especially now that I work so frequently in Pakistan. However, I also feel a sense of responsibility in using my privilege as an American to shed light on these topics through the medium that has been gifted to me. I'm also a proponent of learning from our past to inform our present and change our future – for the better."

By tradition, a Kathak artist is a soloist virtuoso with the supreme ability to portray all character roles (both male and female), enact every character emotion using facial expressions, dance, and elements of mime, demonstrating a capacity to transport audiences.

Kathak, derived from the Sanskrit word "Katha" – meaning "story," is native to Northern India and asserts three main schools of Kathak – based on the regions from which they originate; Lucknow, Jaipur, and Banaras. Before long, stories began to integrate elements of both Hindu and Muslim culture.

Shaikh's introduction to dance began at age five with the study of ballet and jazz, along with baton twirling, offered at the same dance school; all three of which she continued her training in until she was eighteen. In Shaikh's experience, she found baton twirling to be an invaluable medium for developing technique. And while training in ballet and jazz, Shaikh developed a solid foundation in movement and choreography, team building and competition, body awareness and teaching, and an avid appreciation for her mentors.

In 1996, midway through her freshman year at San Francisco State University (SFSU), Shaikh discovered Kathak dance through the Classical Indian dance master, the late Pandit Chitresh Das, who happened to be teaching the first university accredited Kathak course in the country. Shaikh's decision to pursue a dance form she knew little about was a choice based on her desire to feel closer to her culture and help overcome certain cultural insecurities. To her advantage, Shaikh's previous dance training and familiarity with the music of India at home helped dispel any lingering doubt about this newfound pursuit. One



day a week the lesson included a 50-minute lecture, followed by two separate days of 50-minute dance classes.

While Shaikh continued her educational pursuit toward a degree in Women's Studies from SFSU, she embraced the lifelong commitment to learning the Kathak tradition through her instructor Das. Shaikh recalls, "I was so challenged by so many aspects of the form and completely taken by the teaching style of my Guruji (also referred to as Pandit or Das). Pandit was faithful to its classical foundation – Kathak as a way of life, a service to society, and a path to self-knowledge."

Shaikh's teacher Das was a child prodigy schooled in two of the Kathak traditions, Lucknow and Jaipur, both of which he taught his student disciples. His performance career in India led to international acclaim, eventually bringing him to the United States in 1970 through a Whitney Fellowship with a commission to teach Kathak at the University of Maryland; thus, serving as an integral part in bringing Kathak to America. By 1980, Das established his own school, the Chhandam School of Kathak and the Chitresh Das Dance Company.

As a student, Shaikh says, "My Guruji gave limitlessly to his students, and for the most part that was the case for me most of the time. The way Guruji trained my peers and I was to maintain a standard and style that he developed, but he also kindled our individual styles and strengths simultaneously."

She continues, "Guruji had this uncanny ability to be what he referred to as a 'modern Guru in training.' He was a traditionalist in so many ways – old school, hard core, often steeped in tough love. His lessons existed on and off the dance floor. But then he could be this super laid back person to hang out with, laugh with. He was able to identify the potential in each of his students, and this is something I try to do with my students as well. He knew how to push and protect just



enough and held up the proverbial mirror for us (his students) to recognize and see our own strengths and weaknesses – finding parallels to how we approach our dance to that of how we live our lives. He kindled a deep sense of self awareness in me and that, in addition to training my students with integrity and a compassionate sense of nurturing, is something I try to utilize in my own teaching."

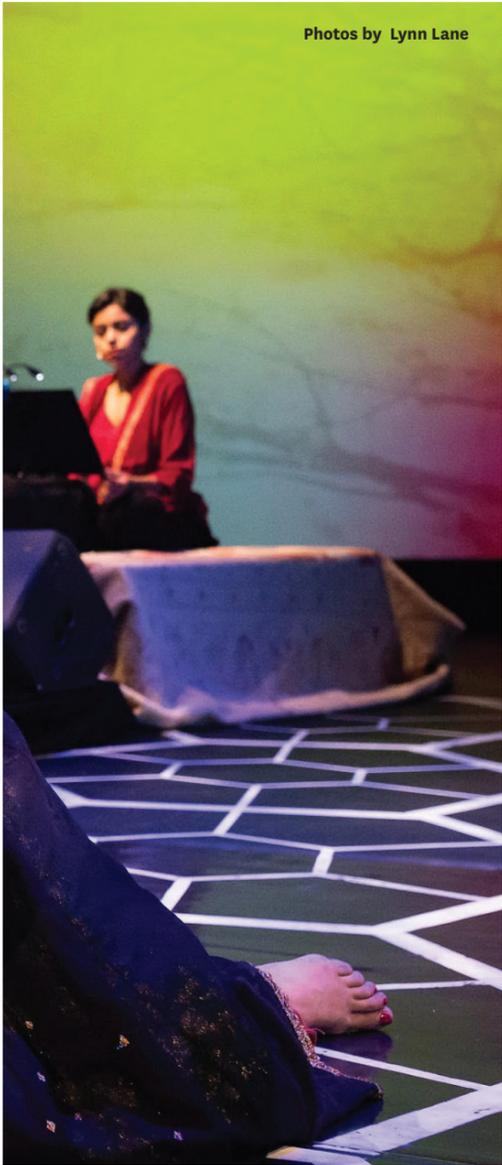
Shaikh distinctly recalls the time when Das revealed her readiness to perform her first Kathak solo. She shares, "I had been training with my Guruji for over 10 years at this point, and I had been a member of his company for just shy of that. I had done some smaller solo performances that had also lent to my experience and preparedness. Ultimately what deemed me ready was the indication from my Guruji through not only his blessing and/or permission, but that he felt I was ready to take on the process and the commitment. And that he felt I was able

to engage with the musicians without him always being present to direct them or me."

To perform as a Kathak soloist, four elements must be mastered; all of which are equally important: 'Tayaari' (technical readiness), 'Laykaari' (rhythmic virtuosity), 'Khoobsurti' (beauty and grace), and 'Nazaakat' (delicacy/refinement).

In the years that followed, a shift occurred in Shaikh and her Guruji's relationship. Shaikh explains, "In 2014, I decided to attempt to navigate this path on my own. I needed to take risks, learn from them, not feel controlled by others, and keep moving forward. Guruji and I did not part on good terms, and generally speaking, stepping away from the Guru is most often frowned upon in traditions such as Kathak, but carrying the dance forward on my own felt like the best way to continue to honor his teachings, and enable me to discover my own artistic voice."

Photos by Lynn Lane



As an independent artist, Shaikh has adapted many poems into Kathak dance pieces. In 2015, Shaikh premiered Indu Sundaresan's *The Twentieth Wife* at Z Space in San Francisco, her first full length production in which she choreographed, performed, and helped adapt for the stage; phase one of Shaikh's tribute works dedicated to the Empress Noor Jahan. That same year, Das passed away suddenly at the age of 70. Though there was no reconciliation between the two a deep commitment to sharing his gifts remains.

Shaikh began training the next generation of Kathak artists in 2015, when she established Noorani Dance in Menlo Park. A traditional Kathak dance school for students age five and up, training includes the foundational aspects of movement technique, the theoretical aspects of the music, as well as the history and philosophy.

Currently, Shaikh is working with a children's book author in Pakistan to adapt her story for a new dance drama. Further expanding her production repertoire, Shaikh says, "My next production for

approximately 50 of my students is based on the time during the Mughal period known as the Golden Age when Emperor Akbar was ruler. He was known for creating an environment in which the arts flourished and people of various faiths coexisted and embraced one another's traditions and cultures. The show titled *Sunehra Noor - A Golden Light* also has a legend that emphasizes the arts as a natural force, has the power to set fire, but also bring rain to put out the fire."

Shaikh has busied herself with another project: "I am working on the next iteration

of *The Partition Project* in which dance will be at the forefront of examining stories and messages related to the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition (independence from the British Empire), bringing us to the present day, where the tension between the two countries is still ever present," says Shaikh.

And starting February 11, 2020, Shaikh will host a new podcast, *The Heartistry*, on DASH Radio's Rukus Avenue Radio; available on various podcast platforms. Invited guests will include professionals from a variety of industries around the globe, with a deep commitment to their work.

Believe it or not, in between teaching, choreographing, networking, hosting a podcast, developing stories for the stage, and preparing for the upcoming production of *The Forgotten Empress*, remarkably Shaikh made time to host a local TED Talk in recent weeks. Really. By any stretch of the imagination, Shaikh's ambition has no limits. Evidently when you're a woman of influence, or at least this woman of influence, ideas never cease.

Originally from San Francisco, **MINA RIOS** is a freelance journalist and voice for the global arts community through stimulating, under-reported journalism. Driven by her background in music, dance, drama, and a passion for the arts, Rios writes for a variety of publications including: *In Dance*, *Sonoma Magazine*, *North Bay Bohemian*, *Pacific Sun*, and *The San Diego Reader*. Rios also offers writing services in ad copy, press releases, business proposals, and grant acquisitions through her consulting business Mina Communications.

The Forgotten Empress, Hammer Theatre Center, San Jose, Feb 28 and 29 at 7:30pm and Z Space, San Francisco, March 5 and 6 at 7:30pm
nooranidance.com

Diamano Coura Celebrates 45 Years of Dancing with a Message

by **ARIES JORDAN**

FOR 45 YEARS, DIAMANO COURA has used West African dance as a vehicle to further the preservation, education, and appreciation of traditional West African music, theater, and culture. Under the leadership of Director Dr. Zak Diouf and Artistic Direction of Naomi Diouf, Diamano Coura has proven to be more than a dance company, but a community. Through ongoing workshops, performances, youth programs, community outreach, and creative partnership programs Diamano Coura has nurtured generations of Bay Area dancers. Diamano Coura Dance Company and their well trained dancers have brought West African dance and culture to audiences in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Diamano Coura has also participated in innovative collaborations with San Francisco and Singapore Ballets to combine classical African dance with European style ballet. Diamano Coura has served countless youth through its arts in education program. More important than their dance representation they are respected elders and role models for artists across various disciplines; including myself. I have witnessed the dynamic dance duo at cultural events and meetings authentically building bridges and connections with members of the Oakland community. As Diamano Coura celebrates its 45th anniversary, I interviewed founders Zak and Naomi. They openly shared what inspired their passion for dance, origins of the Diamano Coura name and their upcoming 25th annual *Collage de la Cultures Africaines* program.

Early influences

Zak discovered his passion for dance close to home in Senegal, while watching his mother's older sister Coura Thiaw. He endearingly called her the "Grandmother of Senegalese dance." She toured internationally and performed traditional West African dance. Zak describes the moment that ignited his passion for dance: "It was 1942 and she had returned from touring in Europe after WWI. Coura Thiaw stood at 5'3" but had a big presence. I watched her in amazement as she kicked her legs high in the air. That day, I committed to pursuing dance." Naomi recalls a family event that featured traditional Liberian dancers performing *Doglor*. *The Doglor* is a war dance from the Grebo/Glebo people of Cape Palmas in the Southeastern Region of Liberia. "I was 6 years old and my family was hosting an event with many people. They began with powerful drumming and then marching. They went through the yard and around the house. I watched in amazement and from that moment I knew I wanted to dance."

Those who bring a message

Diamano Coura means "those who bring the message" in Senegalese Wolof language. Intrigued by the meaning of Diamano Coura, I ask Naomi and Zak to share what was the original message they intended to share 45 years ago. Zak replies, "The message we wanted to popularize is the historical components of African dance and what it represents through the African lens. I see dance as a myth created thousands of years ago and an important resource in understanding Africa's past and present. Dance is a history lesson! We also wanted to show that African culture is not monolithic but includes a wide range of diversity. Senegal is home to many ethnic groups and each has their own way of showing togetherness, strength, love and



respect through dance. In my ethnic group, dance is a part of our religion. We dance for joy, for sorrow and to pass the time. Even Senegal's first president encouraged and funded cultural artists to travel abroad. We were seen as Ambassadors that would make the world more understanding and diverse through traditional dance." Naomi shared similar sentiments about the name and pointed out the historical context that shaped their message. "The 1970s was the time of the Black Arts and Black Power movement in the United States. The African Diaspora desired to change the narrative of Africa and develop a strong sense of identity. At the time African culture and dance was devalued and considered primitive; despite the precise muscle articulation required to correctly execute the purpose and feelings the movement entailed. West African dance provided university students with the opportunity to connect to their African roots or engage with historical facts beyond lecture. Dance had a way of connecting

to students in ways words alone could not. There is a historical component to West African dance that acknowledges the great civilizations and empires to whom these dances belong. At the time, students taking Zak's West African dance classes at San Jose State University wanted to extend cultural literacy beyond the classroom. Dance was seen as an additional avenue to debunk myths about Africa and convey to audiences that West African dance was so much more than jumping around."

Evolution of Diamano Coura message

Over the last couple of decades African dance and culture has gained more acknowledgement and appreciation globally. In almost every dance studio you will see some form of African dance being offered. The internet has also provided access to traditional and contemporary African dances to all interested in learning the various dance forms. I wondered: How has this global recognition and appreciation for African dance changed Diamano Coura's original message? When asked, Naomi acknowledged that the global reverence and interest in West African dance has exposed their original message to a wider audience. The exposure has also created more economic opportunities and creative collaborations for African dancers worldwide. Along with Naomi's celebration of how far African dance has come she doesn't shy away from the fact that African dance

collectively is still fighting to shake the label of primitive dance: "Though African dance is popularized on an international level; from Germany to South America you see dancers incorporating elements of traditional and popular African dance. However, when it comes to analyzing or critiquing African dance techniques, there is still more work to do." Naomi went on to explain, "Even the media struggles to do a proper critique of African dance or doesn't provide one at all, compared to other dance forms. It is no fault of anyone; many lack the language, vocabulary or knowledge needed to provide a dance critique. It is hard to critique or describe what you don't understand."

Collage de la Cultures Africaines

Before wrapping up the interview we discussed another major milestone of Diamano Coura, 25 years of the *Collage de la Cultures Africaines* program. *Collage* is a four-day conference featuring master classes in music, dance and live performances by renowned Bay Area dance companies, which also offers an African marketplace, an opportunity for local vendors to sell their merchandise. Every year, *Collage* showcases the Bay Area's diverse, innovative and multigenerational Black dance movement, in the heart of Oakland. This year's festivities will be hosted at Laney College. Zak describes *Collage* as an opportunity for dancers of all backgrounds to learn about the diversity of African dance with world renowned instructors. "It is also a homecoming! We have trained five generations of dancers and they often return with their grandchildren or great grandchildren." Naomi also joins in on Zak's excitement of the upcoming *Collage de la Cultures Africaines* program: "*Collage* is always an exciting gathering of old friends and bringing in new ones. At *Collage* you will see political discourse, civic questions explored and history through dance performances and workshops. It is an intergenerational event and open to all cultures interested in learning about the evolution of African dance and techniques found in all current dance."

We have two new groups, Afro Urban Society and a soloist from the Ivory Coast. Afro Urban Society pays homage to traditional African dance while incorporating contemporary dance from the African diaspora. We also will feature Soloist Fely Tchaco from the Ivory Coast performing *Zaouli Dance*. *The Zaouli Dance* is a masked dance that is traditionally performed by a man, but, at the *Collage*, will be performed by a woman. Additionally, returning after many years representing Tahiti dance group Hālau Ka Ua Tuahine will grace the stage. Every year we attempt to break boundaries at *Collage de la Cultures Africaines* and welcome dancers of all backgrounds and levels to join in the festivities."

ARIES JORDAN is an Educator, Storyteller, and Writer. She holds an MFA in English and Creative Writing from Mills College. Her writing weaves prose, proverbs, and cultural narratives into enticing reviews, poems, blog posts, product and service descriptions that provoke thought and inner reflection. She is a proud New Yorker based in Oakland, CA. Social media: @ariesjthepoet

Collage de la Cultures Africaines,
Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts,
Oakland, March 12-15, diamanocoura.org

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