Dancers’ Group promotes performance deadlines, local news, and more

MEMBERSHIP

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

Dancers’ Group has extended all memberships through June 2021. If you’re interested in becoming a new member, consider joining at our free Community level.

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WELCOME

I’VE BEEN READING, READING, READING.

It’s a lovely part of my job. I get to read grant proposals, budgets (numbers tell a story, too), research studies, emails and numerous articles featured in In Dance — finding comfort and inspiration as I read in my spare time.

My post-work reading is eclectic and is made up of consuming features in various online publications. Also, I love fiction books — like Bryan Washington’s beautiful novel called Memorial. And I’ve been reading lots of NY Times features on artists. Through these pieces I’m being introduced to live-treasures. They’ve become my weekly, sometimes daily, inspire-pleasure.

Here’s a highlight of those I’ve been learning about. I’ve fallen for the artist Lorraine O’Grady whose newspaper poems from 1977 are stunning visual dances. The artist Boni Horn has led me to appreciate the word “acclimatize”—I want to figure out how to use it in a sentence. And Horn states: “Since I know what I want, but not what it looks like, it takes time to focus and arrive at some form of clarity.”

I needed to hear that “it takes time to focus.” And then there’s the brilliant Kyohei Sakaguchi: “I do what I do in order to keep living.” The matter of factness of Sakaguchi’s statement slays. That they do what they do to live, resonates so deeply during a pandemic. I feel such a kinship within their words. Connecting with artists — even abstractly through interviews — comforts and is simply wondrous.

Wondrous words from dance artists is a way to ensure their voices and ideas are documented and visible. Highlighting how they maneuver complex relationships with their community, with their collaborators and especially how they connect with artists that motivate their own work and thinking. Are you ready? Within these pages are the most amazing writings Dancers’ Group has put out. I think this each time we publish, it really is true now and it will be true next time too—wink, wink. The featured writers in the Spring issue address how we are finding ways to connect through art making with artists that motivate their own work and thinking.

Are you ready? Within these pages are the most amazing writings Dancers’ Group has put out. I think this each time we publish, it really is true now and it will be true next time too—wink, wink. The featured writers in the Spring issue address how we are finding ways to connect through art making with artists that motivate their own work and thinking. Are you ready? Within these pages are the most amazing writings Dancers’ Group has put out. I think this each time we publish, it really is true now and it will be true next time too—wink, wink. The featured writers in the Spring issue address how we are finding ways to connect through art making with artists that motivate their own work and thinking.

Be well,

—Wayne Hazzard, Artist Administrator

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SEAN DORSEY, FRESH MEAT PRODUCTIONS, AND TRANS JOY

by SIMA BELMAR

As he looks back on 20 years of making and producing performance by trans, gender-nonconforming (GNC), two-spirit, and queer artists in the Bay Area and across the country, Sean Dorsey, Artistic Director of Sean Dorsey Dance (SDD) and founder of Fresh Meat Productions (FMP), is positively glowing. Founded in 2001, Fresh Meat Productions is a trans-led-and-serving, history-making organization committed to shining a light on and reflecting the voices amplified, uplifted, and represented in theatrical contexts.

To mark the milestone, FMP has launched The Lost Art of Dreaming Project, a constellation of online events spread out over the course of 2021, a Spring 2022 premiere, and a 10+-city tour through 2024. This year, The Lost Art of Dreaming will feature SDD’s AT-HOME Season (April 16-18) that includes a series of gorgeous site-specific dance films and messages from Dorsey; a second season of “Stay Fresh At Home,” a free online series of videos dedicated to creative wellness; the 20th Anniversary Fresh Meat Festival (June 17-19, online), showcasing an incredible lineup including the work of commissioned artists, Antoine Hunter/Purple Fire Crow, J Mase III, Jahaira & Angelica, Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi, Mark Travis Rivera, and Randy Ford, supported by FMP’s FRESH WORKS! program; and a monthly release of free activities, including Postcards from the Future, which highlights the work of four commissioned visual artists, and The Dictionary of Joy and Pleasure, a free, interactive online A-to-Z with contributions by ten commissioned artists. There’s even a “Futureist Pledge” that folks can download, sign, and share.

The Lost Art of Dreaming is a project with a singular yet expansive mission: “to explore and create expansive futures” for trans, GNC, two-spirit, and queer communities. Dorsey and I had two lengthy conversations about what it looks like to center joy and pleasure in artistic and social practice. Belmar: Have you always been a dancer? Sean Dorsey: Yes! But I always say that I did not grow up at the ballet barre. I loved dance with every cell in my body. I spent all my time in my leotard, dancing around to records. I had no other formal dance training until right after I graduated from high school when I did a summer session largely based on the choreography of Janet Jackson—it was amazing. And then I started taking classes, mostly modern dance, some jazz, in college (University of British Columbia), but community level, drop-in stuff. I remember loving it so, so much, but my career and my heart’s trajectory was on the community organizing, social justice path. I felt clear that my calling was to be of service and do justice-seeking work.

SB: I too remember having a tambourine with ribbons attached to it among other things with ribbons attached to them. I remember being around four and dancing with these wire things with flowers attached to them to the song “Thank Heaven for Little Girls.”

SD: I had no other formal dance training until right after I graduated from high school when I did a summer session largely based on the choreography of Janet Jackson—it was amazing. And then I started taking classes, mostly modern dance, some jazz, in college (University of British Columbia), but community level, drop-in stuff. I remember loving it so, so much, but my career and my heart’s trajectory was on the community organizing, social justice path. I felt clear that my calling was to be of service and do justice-seeking work.

SB: So that’s why you’re able to make work and organize so many events and programs! What was your major?

SD: I did a double major in Political Science and Women’s Studies. After that, I started a graduate program in community economic development, and also started taking classes in the dance department. When I was 25, I started thinking about getting training. I couldn’t dance often enough! I was taking ballet with this one teacher who one day asked me to stay after class. When she asked me if I’d ever thought about being a professional dancer, my mind exploded. It was a landscape-altering moment.

SB: I remember it was a project with a singular yet expansive mission: “to explore and create expansive futures” for trans, GNC, two-spirit, and queer communities. Dorsey and I had two lengthy conversations about what it looks like to center joy and pleasure in artistic and social practice. Belmar: Have you always been a dancer? Dorsey: Yes! But I always say that I did not grow up at the ballet barre. I loved dance with every cell in my body. I spent all my time in my leotard, dancing around to records. I was always making up dances. I did have a lot of early training and performing in theater and music, mostly piano, choral stuff, youth theater. But most of my dancing was in my living room. I took a “ballet” class series when I was 5 and remember having an awesome tambourine with long ribbons attached to it, so I’m pretty sure it wasn’t classical ballet.
Up until that moment I had literally never imagined I could become a professional dancer; how could I, when I had never seen another person like me in dance? So I took a year off of grad school, entered a two-year studio-based Dance program, and never looked back.

The very first piece of choreography I made at dance school was a duet and it was definitely queer. At that point I hadn’t seen a lot of dance-theater or “talking dance,” but from the beginning I’ve always felt called to bring in elements of story and text. The local dance community came out to see these student recitals, and was very supportive of young students and their burgeoning craft. I don’t remember feeling nervous at all about my work being queer. People were awesome: I was blown away by the incredibly positive response and feedback from professional dancers to my baby-choreography. They were “interested in my voice” and “were excited to see what I did next.” The day after the show, in morning technique class, the school director pulled me out, sat me down in her office, and told me sternly that my piece “made people feel very uncomfortable”—which was not even a little bit true. I had experienced the exact opposite. I don’t know how I had the wherewithal to feel sure of that truth at the time, but I did. She actually withheld my graduation certificate at the end of my program. In that moment, the years of all the awful experiences in gendered bathrooms, gendered costumes, everything came crashing down on me. But at the same time, I realized that this was how I could forge change in the world, this was my calling, and this was how I could be of service. Her words made me realize the power of dance-theater work that’s based in the body, in story, and in language.

SB: What do you love about dancing?
SD: Feeling into my love of dancing, there is both the love of velocity and the momentum of movement, the embodiment of energy and emotion, but also a real love of the relationship and response to music. But I have also always loved storytelling. Those were not separate things. You know a lot about me if you know that my favorite childhood movies were Fame and The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Rocky Horror was so huge for me. Here’s this amazing, sexy, gender-expansive, fierce, totally embodied character in Frankenfurter.

SB: Fame came out in 1980, when I was 9 and you were 7. It was not a thing to watch at that age!
SD: When I go back and watch it now, I’m like, This is the most depressing movie about trauma and abuse ever! But at the time all that mattered was Leroy, roller skates, and the romantic notion of bottle caps on the bottom of your shoes. That was my dream high school, but I never imagined my own adult life being about dance and performance. I never saw anybody like me in those fields doing those things. So it wasn’t like, gosh, I wish someday I could do this. There was literally no brain pathway for that for me because I literally didn’t exist in the world.

Trans people of my generation and older—and maybe just a little bit younger—we had to work so hard to find any proof of our existence other than our own selves in the world. For example, my partner, Shawna Virago, a trans woman musician, filmmaker, and director of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival, talks about going to the public library just to find anything, and there being like one weird medical book on transsexuality. There was no internet, no blogs, no Gay Straight Alliances in high school, there was nothing, unless you saw maybe a transsexual on the Donahue show. If I had been lucky enough to know or been connected to ballroom culture and voguing, I would have been like here’s this amazing trans/GNC leadership, lineage, and ancestry. Here’s this long lineage of Black and Latinx trans women, queers and GNC folks with this amazing dance and performance form and huge chosen-family/community network.

Flash forward to today, and so much has changed while so much has still not changed: in pop culture we still have cisgender people being as trans. Totally unacceptable when there are so many talented trans and nonbinary actors. But in dance also, we’ve seen many institutions investing in works for the stage that portray trans characters as pathological, disturbed characters, and even more institutions and companies bringing exactly zero trans bodies, dancers or leadership to the stage. And not having dance educators who are trans, non-binary, or GNC. The Bay Area, like the rest of the country, still has to do a lot better.

SB: How did you make your way to the Bay Area?
SD: In June 2001, I performed my first work in the Bay Area for the final Lesbian and Gay Dance Festival at Dance Mission. I had seen Dance Brigade perform in Vancouver a few years before. It was one of the first times I’d seen dance theater that was fiery and political, imbued with text and story; they were just gloriously ripping into colonialism and misogyny. I kept presenting work under my name, and then I date my company, Sean Dorsey Dance, from when we had our first full evening home season, which was 2003.

SB: How did you come up with the name Fresh Meat Productions?
SD: In 2002, I brought together a group of artists and activists to put on what we thought would be a one-time festival of trans and queer performance. We wanted to center trans artists, center BIPOC, queer/trans artistry, and do it gorgeously. At an early planning meeting at a Mission café, we were like, “What do we call this thing?” Jesse Bie said, “Let’s call it...”
fresh meat,” and there was this collective gasp of excitement. So saucy at the time!

SB: Jesse is the sauciest!
SD: Absolutely! He had already long been bringing BIPOC queer dance-theater to theaters and to the streets across the Bay with his company STEAMROLLER Dance. This was when we founded Fresh Meat Productions. At that time (2002), there was an amazing groundswell of trans performance and artists, but nobody was programming, presenting, or curating trans and gender-nonconforming artists. Nobody would touch us. There were queer events, but most were majority white cis non-disabled artists. So we came together—dance peers, trans artist activists, friends—to put on a festival that centered majority BIPOC, trans, queer, and GNC artists including disabled artists. It was about reclaiming ourselves, our bodies, and our creative expression as powerful, sexy, and worthy of taking up the space that had hitherto been denied to our communities.

Elizabeth Gorelik did our first photo shoot at ODC; there were lots of fresh meat, but there was also a selective gasp of excitement. So saucy! And not everybody sees themselves in the new equity, “everybody is welcome” statements. Right. When white cisgender non-disabled people say something generic like “everybody is welcome,” it often means “you’re welcome in theory but our facility, staff, and practices might still be harmful or excluding.” Welcoming needs to be a verb, not a passive value. We white people in leadership don’t get to claim to be “anti-racist” or say we care about white supremacy unless we can back it up with daily, concrete, meaningful and accountable action.

At FMP, when we have any kind of public event we always list a bunch of information right on our website, ticketing page, and social media that we hope is helpful for people to feel that they are thought of ahead of time and welcomed into that space. For example, we will share that the entrance, bathrooms, and seating are wheelchair accessible, the front row seats are all armless for fat or super-fat folks, we only ever use venues with all gender bathrooms, we provide a monitored scent-free seating area, we never require “legal ID” to purchase or pick up tickets. This is to say, I’m specifically thinking of you, I want you to feel like you are welcome, and here are the loving accommodations we’re providing. I’d like to see those statements on a venue’s ticketing page. Z Space is our artistic home for a reason—they’ve always been awesome. Part of their leadership staff team includes a trans person. After years of temporarily allowing us to make their bathrooms all-gender during our events, they permanently and lovingly made all their bathrooms all gender.

SB: Reflecting on the last twenty years, what has changed about the Bay Area performance landscape in terms of both trans representation and influence?
SD: It’s painful to witness the continued refusal of most Bay Area dance leadership and spaces to take any actual action around trans equity. There are a lot of trans supportive “values” but almost no action or policies and procedures put in place. It’s absolutely unacceptable that most of our dance spaces don’t have any trans/non-binary faculty, trans programming, all-gender changing rooms or all-gender bathrooms. I call upon Bay Area dance venues and spaces to use the shutdown period of the pandemic to fix this—AND PUT NEW SIGNS ON YOUR BATHROOMS, DARNIT! I will mail you the sharpies if you don’t have any.

SB: And not everybody sees themselves in the new equity, “everybody is welcome” statements.
SD: Right. When white cisgender non-disabled people say something generic like “everybody is welcome,” it often means “you’re welcome in theory but our facility, staff, and practices might still be harmful or excluding.” Welcoming needs to be a verb, not a passive value. We white people in leadership don’t get to claim to be “anti-racist” or say we care about white supremacy unless we can back it up with daily, concrete, meaningful and accountable action.

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It’s painful to witness the continued refusal of most Bay Area dance leadership and spaces to take any actual action around trans equity.
It’s also awesome that CounterPulse intentionally planned for and built their new facility with only all-gender bathrooms, and regularly presents/supports trans/Two-Spirit/intersex queer/femme/inclusive arts. I love trans people and I love trans artists. When I’m in our workshop spaces, our audiences, our community forums, I’m so blessed out. There’s so much creativity and desire and shimmery, sparkly creativity. That’s what drives us—our beauty and our gifts.

So many people in so many communities live amidst harm, daily oppression, violence, but what gets forged out of that is joy, resilience, awesomeness, sass, beauty.

So what feels very important at the 20th anniversary mark, is to remember how 20 years ago almost no one was doing this, and now, every week, I have young nonbinary or trans aspiring dancers reaching out to me from all across the country. I came of age, having no peers in the dance world and it’s so exciting to witness so many gender expansive folks. It’s also frustrating that so little has changed, how few trans dance leaders we see, we don’t see trans artists being presented, trans folks given residencies, on staff, on boards of directors, in leadership and decision-making power at foundations or funding agencies. The values and friendliness are there, but the action is not. Like all the white folks in leadership claiming to have anti-white-supremacist values, with little to no action.

SB: I called you a trans ambassador, a moniker you accepted and that also frustrated you to some extent because of the way it erases your identity and work as an artist.

SD: I’m so proud to be trans and love being an ambassador. There is a profound level of exhaustion I’ve worked myself into. So muchtraveling and speaking and advocacy, and teaching and touring, prior to the pandemic, that I’d totally worked myself into the ground. I will keep advocating and fighting for intersectional trans equity, but I also have to stop and find a balance for Sean the artist.

When I think back to 20 years ago and how I brought some folks together to put on this “one-time” Fresh Meat Festival, it was about the fact that at that time almost nobody was putting trans artists on stages with high production values, and nobody was paying us for our art. Probably for the next 8-10 years, if I had press interviews as Sean Dorsey and Sean Dorsey Dance, writers wouldn’t ever write on my nonbinary identity and ask me Trans 101 questions. Nobody was like, “Tell me about your craft.” It was years before I got to talk about that in interviews.

It was also awesome that CounterPulse intentionally planned for and built their new facility with only all-gender bathrooms, and regularly presents/supports trans/Two-Spirit/intersex queer/femme/inclusive arts, unlike most other Bay Area dance venues. Shawl Anderson as a home for trans/Two-Spirit/NB artists, supports trans artists and their current project emphasizes trans love t-shirts, the idea is that we can be the future, and what’s in the sky, connecting what’s out there, the Future, and what’s in the body. Some of that movement was started about that swirling cosmos, that Future energy, and how we might connect it to our body. Me and my dancers (Nol Simonse, Will Woodward, Raul Torres-Bonilla) have been doing this “cosmic connective tissue” movement research in our Zoom rehearsals 3 days a week since the beginning of the pandemic.

SB: When you demonstrate and talk about these core-distal relationships, I can start to think about why one might choreograph exaggerated finger extensions and reaches toward the furthest point away from the body. Dance is a tremendously powerful and successful communicator of force and energy, but it’s a shitty communicator of ideas. Because I don’t think that’s what it was born to do. And it’s a very Western idea that viewers of dance should know what it means, should understand it, “get it,” and if they don’t know, they’re going to get anxious and pissed and dismiss it. I think it’s important for me to hear from an artist about the movement choices they make. Now I can revisit the films and think about the relationship between my material reality and my interiority and how far I can reach as I continue to be stuck in these pandemic bubbles.

SD: In most of the video posts, there’s no relationship to language or text. This project is really different for me so far because I generally work with text and writing. The Missing Generation (2018) started with a lot of research, a year and a half and 75 hours of oral history interviews I recorded with survivors of the early AIDS epidemic, and then 500 hours editing it down to a sound score, all before the movement creation. My current process—I don’t know where it will end up. I look forward to getting back into the studio because grand-scale costumes had also been driving our movement creation. Now they’re in storage at Dance Mission, these huge gowns with 6-foot trains.

SB: Thinking about Tim Curry’s delicious embodiment in Rocky Horror, how do we get people to understand the material sensations and pleasures of embodiment as processes and practices that exist on a nonthreatening continuum of embodiments? Are we getting closer to that? How can dance artists help audiences develop an awareness that their embodiments are these rich amazing things that are being limited by social norms?

SD: As an artist and activist I’ve learned that the crucible, the transformation happens through personal, shared, felt experience. It’s a bats in your mouth experience, getting people in the theater, or into the conversation, or into the workshop, or into the online experience. Whether we’re watching a dance film online, or watching dancers on stage, that experience, that witnessing gives us an embodied visceral experience. It involves our breath, our heart, our muscles contracting in empathic reaction. There’s something magical about when the lights go down and your guard is dropped, your heart and mind are open in a different way. The magic and change happen there.
YOU CAN STILL SEE THE BURN SCARS that dot the hills near the campus where I live, which is on the unceded territory of the Awaswas-speaking Uypi tribe and the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Last year’s CZU Lightning Complex fires burned over 86,000 acres in Santa Cruz County and brought ash from counties far away. When the rains came in February, several areas were evacuated from potential debris flow as a result of the fires’ devastation. We’ve lost power, too, here and there, because the electrical grid has been damaged. Remarkably, you can see much more wildlife than usual – either because they have been displaced due to their natural habitats having been destroyed or because of rewilding, a process where animals return to spaces where they hadn’t been allowed to roam freely before. As a result of humans stepping back, ecological restoration is underway, and although the air is cleaner now, the weather remains unpredictable.

BURN SCARS

by GERALD CASEL
Racialized climates can be seen and felt by artists of color but thanks to the privileges afforded to them by whiteness, white people do not have to acknowledge how they benefit from such systemic forces; it is simply the norm.

We’re coming up on one year since COVID-19 restrictions have been in place. Since I haven’t been able to dance regularly, my feet have lost their calluses. Those layers of skin have thinned and are prone to injury from floor burns and splits while allowing me to turn, glide, and brush the floor without pain. Losing calluses also means a loss of felt sense, being out of shape, and general tightness. We haven’t had our rigorous movement practices and communal exchanges in shared spaces and that lack of human contact has also produced sustained emotional distress.

Callousness can also be used as a metaphor for emotional hardening—protection from constant oppression or harm. As a dance artist of color, I know how to deploy this emotional armor when I need it to survive macroaggressions and microaggressions assaults—like that time in ballet class when a white woman physically forced me to move because I was blocking her view of herself in the mirror. Violence like this happens quick, leaving me frozen and burned with anger, but the scars last for a long time. This incident reminded me how “white body supremacy,” a term used by somatic abolitionists Kesuma Memakami, allows white people to take up space and claim ownership over shared or public spaces. I take care not to be too hardened by these jabs and seek balance when navigating the unpredictable weather of white supremacy. In her book, In the Wake, On Blackness and Being, Christina Sharpe describes the possible metaphors and materiality of “the weather” that exists between anti-Blackness and white supremacy are pervasive. Sharpe writes, “The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies.” We can apply this metaphor to challenge the structures of whiteness that create conditions of exclusion by restoring a felt sense of safety through an embodied preparedness that can weather white supremacist culture. By doing so, we can alter the atmosphere and generate new ecosystems that minimize harm while acknowledging the harm when it arises.

Last summer, instigated by Jill Homan Randall and as part of a series of writing that featured the Dancing Around Race cohort, I wrote a piece called “Reprinting as a Performance of Benevolent Colonialism.” I have been thinking about how this needs to be revisited, especially now at the year-long mark of COVID-19 and after the many pronouncements of diversity, equity, and inclusion that white-led organizations have pre-announced on websites, social media, and in many online interactions where I have witnessed emotional performances of solidarity.

In addition to having annual seasons, many white dance artists with companies or organizations have benefitted from receiving large grants only to disperse funds through a festival or through a shared evening of dance that promotes emerging artists of color. This is possible, in part, because these white choreographers have lived and worked in the Bay Area for some time but also because they have solid support from funders who also (through general operating support grants) cover the costs of administrative, marketing, and development and grant writing support. What if white artists who are able to receive these funds refrain from doing so, so that artists of color can receive the funds directly? What if we got rid of the ‘middle man,’ or the part that feels the most need of intervention – this sense that People of Color know all-too-well as imperial benevolence? In other words, changing the narrative that says white people will fix your community, save you from being irrelevant, and prescribe educational and enrichment programs so that they look charitable and have no hidden ulterior motives.

Unfortunately, even after the overdue racial reckoning that inspired so many people to protest in the streets with powerful calls to action following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, things have not changed much in terms of racial politics and power dynamics in the Bay Area dance ecology. White-led dance organizations resume operations as if nothing has changed – not acknowledging how they benefit from their social position through the institutional structures of whiteness. Informed by scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, who remind us that decolonization is not a metaphor, this “evasion” or failure by white people to enact sustained and systemic change gives rise to platitudes that are nothing more than performative gestures.

Because of historical, legal, and institutional barriers such as redlining, racial quotas, restrictive voting and immigration laws, and other settler colonial logics that create a closed, hierarchical system that regulates who owns what, generational wealth gaps between white people and their BIPOC counterparts endure. This atmosphere of inequity is true here in San Francisco, where most of the major dance companies, performance spaces, and organizations are owned and run by white people. The system is set up such that BIPOC artists must rely on “renting” from established white artists, which perpetuates white saviorism, white ownership, and Black and brown tenancy.

Racialized climates can be seen and felt by artists of color but thanks to the privileges afforded to them by whiteness, white people do not have to acknowledge how they benefit from such systemic forces; it is simply the norm. As an example, many white-led organizations continue to produce well-meaning programs that support (emerging) artists of color as well as mentorship programs that imply a boost to those artists’ careers. Such white savior mentality is complicated by the notion of white ownership, and those who fund white-led organizations continue to contribute to racial capitalism by promoting a logic of possession. This creates specific turbulence for those of us whose families have never owned any property and who have had to more frequently because of our tenancy status. It is a struggle to feel a sense of belonging even when these gestures of support from white-led organizations seem benevolent.

What would happen if foundations gave resources directly to artists of color rather than brokering them through systematic white gatekeeping? Would BIPOC artists feel more of a sense of ownership rather than being owned by these organizations who parade their institutional ethos of racial equity and inclusion? On the other hand, what if BIPOC artists refuse these offers and instead collectively generate their own systems of support that foster communal care and mutual aid?

As we navigate through the unpredictable climate of racial inequity and as we imagine a future that values the cultural wealth of BIPOC communities, we must weather storms of white supremacy and plant seeds that will grow and transform burn scars into new growth. Refusing colonial structures that reinforce separation, competition, and exploitation, we will find ways to reallocate the spaces that have not been available to us. Tending to our bodies and each other, we can learn to heal from generational trauma, and, like calluses, we can regenerate tougher skin that will protect us from the elements.

My writing and thinking have been influenced by conversations with the Dancing Around Race collective (Davíd Hererra, Yayoi Kambara, Kimani Foulin, Bhumi B. Patel, and Raissa Simpson). I have also been inspired by the writings of Maile Okamura, amusementment, Claudia Rankine, Christina Sharpe, and Edgar Villanueva.

Gerald Casel (he/him) is the artistic director ofgeraldcasel.com, his choreographic research complicates and provokes questions surrounding colonialism, collective cultural amnesia, whiteness and privilege, and the tensions between the invisible/perceived/obvious structures of power. Casel is an Associate Professor of Dance in the Department of Theater Arts and is the Provost of Porter College at UC Santa Cruz. A graduate of The Juilliard School, with an MFA from UW Milwaukee, Casel received a Bessie award for sustained achievement for dance in the companies of Stephen Petronio; Lar Lubovitch; Stankley Love, among others. His newest work, Not About Rice Dance, has been awarded a National Dance Project grant and will be in residence at the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography and will premiere at CounterPulse with a forthcoming national tour Dancing Around Race, a community-centered project that creates a place where he found that examines racial inequity in the Bay Area and beyond, continues to grow. Geraldcasel.com
THIS IS THE STORY OF A DANCING BANANA. Try saying it out loud: “Dancing banana.” On the first syllable of “dancing” and the second syllable of “banana” your mouth turns up into a smile.

This is the story of two dancing bananas.

I have a new friend. Her name is Jane. She is a remarkable visual artist, a retired high school art teacher, a mama of two kitties—Grace and Frankie, a wearer of many hats (literally and figuratively), and a lover of the moon, hummingbirds and butterflies. Jane is also a person living with Alzheimer’s Disease.

Jane and I were dancing over Zoom recently when she asked her wife, “Do we have any bananas?” Her wife, Joyce, nodded at the fruit basket. Jane sauntered over and retrieved one. I grabbed a banana, too. Jane tucked hers into the front of her shirt. I copied her, leaving the stem poking out. It looked like the beak of a yellow bird. I started whistling. Jane copied me. We gently danced our banana birds. We whistled and balanced our bananas on our heads, hands and feet. We listened to them like telephones. We smoked them like cigars.

Then Jane asked Joyce if they had any more bananas. I only had the one so I grabbed a gourd. Jane retrieved a second banana. She placed her bananas in her imaginary holster. Mine went into my waistband. Joyce said, “Ready...Set...” [Jane wiggled her fingers], “Fire!” Jane’s draw was so fast I got caught with my hands in my pants. We erupted in peals of laughter.


Joyce is a mother, grandmother, retired court reporter and creative writer. I have asked her to help me write a handbook on how to support dementia caregivers. She comes from a family of strong women, but when it comes to caregiving she chafes when people say, “Oh, you’re so strong, you’re so brave. It must be SO hard.”

“What is SO hard, tell me?” she writes in the handbook. “And what would you expect? ‘You’re so brave, you’re so strong’ – would you expect a caregiver to be anything else?”

Many of us have been treading water since the pandemic started. Joyce has been caregiving 24/7 with very little respite. I imagine a constant caregiver hiss, a drone drowning out everything else. “The pool” metaphor surfaced during the wintertime. “It’s hard to come out of caregiving, out of the pool,” Joyce writes. “Come see me inside the pool, swim with me and keep the loneliness at bay.”

Dementia caregivers are especially susceptible to Caregiver Burden, a medical term used to describe a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

“It’s like existing in another substance,” Joyce writes. “Grief touches every place, every cell, like water, it changes you. Joy can emerge from grief. Rowena comes and jumps in the pool with us.”

I MET JOYCE AND JANE in February 2020 when I was looking for participants for a creative research project I’m piloting. Over the past five years my For You performance collective collaborators, Erika Chong Shuch and Ryan Tacata, and I have developed a person-centered performance practice. Our goals are to bring strangers together and to make performances as gifts. We wanted to see if this practice
of personalized creative engagement could make a difference in the lives of dementia caregivers and their care recipients, people who are often iso-
lated and stigmatized.

“Welcome to Joyce the World — A Winter Solstice Variety Show,” I announced to a handful of guests on Zoom. It was Monday December 21st during the Saturn-Jupiter Great Conjunction of 2020. The pandemic was surging so we abandoned our flash mob performance fantasy and instead presented a scrappy Zoom-based potpourri of performative gifts for Joyce: “butterflies” (Erika) dancing out from under bedsheets, an art anec|tructure from Ryan’s bathtub, an ani-
mal spirit card reading from a sha-
manistic cat (my friend Temple). I opened the show with a dedica-
tion: “As a devoted partner, mother, grandmother and friend; as a cosmic being full of grace; as a human com-
ppanion to Grace and Frankie; and as a full time dementia caregiver full of love without condition...” A sob lodged in my throat. All of the unex-
pressed tears that had accumulated over months of witnessing Joyce were swimming to the surface. “...This is a gift to say: We see you. We hear you. And we love you!” Erika’s cousins—Ted and NeMatha Fink (GBHI) — spent the evening Core—kicked things off by caroling, “Joyce to the world / this is a song / for Joyce / rejoice / and sing! / Let every child be safe / care her room / the wonder of her love / the wonder of her love / wonder of her love…”

THIS IS A STORY that repeats itself. The other day Jane asked, “Do you know me?” I told her I did. “How long have you known me?” I told her I met her about a year ago. “How do you know me?” she asked. “As a fellow artist,” I said. “I think we can learn from each other about how art can support dementia,” I told her, “because I think it really, really helps.”

“Can I ask you a question?” Jane asked. “How long have you known me?” I told her about me and then said, “Do you know me?” she asked. I told her that I was a fellow artist learning how to help people with dementia. “Oh, dimm...dimm...that word,” she said, struggling to say “dimm.”

“Can I ask you a question?” I said. “What is something nice we can do for Joyce?” She thought about it for a moment and then replied, “It’s hard to say.” I responded by hug-
ging myself and then extending my arms out to her. She opened her arms, raised and lowered them, like wings. (Birds and birdwatching are some of Jane’s favorite things.) The barrier of language was removed; there was no sense of right or wrong answers; we were just moving together. Art Ther-
apist and Experiential Researcher Dr. Erin Partidge has said working with people with dementia is being in a creative, non-judgmental, non goal-oriented way—communicates, “You are worthy of having community, I see you.”

I AM AN ATLANTIC FELLOW for Equity in Brain Health at the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) at UCSF and Trinity College, Dublin, dedicated to improving brain health and reducing the scale and impact of dementia worldwide. Through the fellowship I was awarded a grant by GBHI, the Alzheimer’s Association and the Alzheimer’s Society (UK) to pilot For You’s personalized creative engagement practice. One of the aims of the pilot was to validate care partners and their loved ones living with dementia. Oftentimes we think of performance as an opportunity to see. What happens if it’s an opportuni-
ty for audiences—our participating care partners and their loved ones—to be seen?

Is there a tool that measures how much it feels to be seen?

One of my favorite GBHI faculty members, Dr. Virginia Sturm, Associate Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at UCSF, developed a study called “A Walks.” In the study, older adults who took weekly 15-minute “A Walks”—focusing on their energy and attention outward instead of inward—reported increased positive emotions and less distress in their daily lives. This shift was reflected in “selfless” parkour walks on their walks, in which an increas-
ing focus on their surroundings rather than themselves was paralleled by measurably broader smiles by the end of the study. They could see the mea-
surable change in the number of pix-
els the smiles occupied.

Science requires proof. I’m having difficulty proving our claim that per-
sonalized creative engagement val-
dates the experience and worth of care partners and their loved ones. For one thing, I’m struggling to come up with an assessment tool that is both sensi-
tive enough to measure the amount of meaning making participants do, and flexible enough to work with her capacity for assessments. A tool that wouldn’t require her to come up with answers that are “Hard to say,”

BUT THERE’S ANOTHER OBSTACLE making it hard to prove. A societal hyp-
critical resistance to creativity and art-making was so tremendous that we decided to just say our invitation to participate was, ‘I have a question of the day, would you like to hear it at all?’ When she got an overwhelming response.

There’s a part of me that subscribes to this code-switching tactic—call-
ing our pilot an “intervention” when we’re talking to researchers, an “art project” when we’re talking to artists, “deep hanging out” when we’re try-
ing to recruit participants. But part of me worries: how are we ever going to substantiate art if we can’t say it?"
MAKING AND NOT MAKING IN THE TIME OF COVID

In mid-December 2020, my friend and colleague Christy Funsch and I began a conversation about how to find a way to work together in creative practice through the geographical distance which are our current circumstances—she sheltering in place in Butler, Pennsylvania and me in San Francisco, California, the traditional land of the Lenni Lenape and Ramaytush Ohlone people, respectively (and respectfully. We support the work of Sogorea Te Land Trust - Shuumi Land Tax and encourage you to check them out).

Christy and I have had a working relationship since 2010 when I was a performer in her dance White Girls for Black Power. Since that time, our relationship has grown and included many hours of improvisational practice in the studio and in performance, inside and outside, as well as rich conversations and sharing of perspectives about creative practice.
For Two Artists Who Are Self-Producing Events for Their Local Communities, the Notion of Having a Practice That Negated Any Kind of Product Appealed—at Once Sustainable and Restorative.

We were set to be working together again throughout 2020, on Christy’s new work EPOCH, which was scheduled to premiere at ODC Theater in San Francisco, in fall of 2020. Needless to say, this was rescheduled along with the multitude. As our adaptability was tested, our ability to function and approach process in the usual ways has been faced with increasing ambiguity. The need to reframe artistic practices has become paramount.

We wanted to find a way to work together but without the historically valued parameter of creating any type of product or production—no dance film, no choreographic hold onto and no performative component (maybe subconsciously invoking Yvonne Rainer’s infamous No Manifesto). For two artists who are self-producing events for their local communities, the notion of having a practice that negated any kind of product appealed—at once sustainable and restorative. It spoke to embracing a formalism that is of this moment in time—at once rejecting productivity in a definitive way, but also forging a rigorous practice which asks for a specific level of commitment and duration scope.

One that values “task over longing”. What does this mean? It’s a boost for sure, and some of that boost is the not-so-simple realization that you’re doing it. You’re held to the same task. It’s like we’re co-workers. And in the sharing of data and documentation there’s a language that’s ours—we are co-authoring it as we practice. I find a lot of richness and mystery in the way minds work, and our minds work differently. I admire how you articulate your perceptions. I try on the words you use, I take them with me, almost like a puzzle of sorts, and if I start there in that thought process of deciphering, then I am led somewhere. It isn’t as casual as “Oh! Now I know what she is talking about, I’ll do that, too.” It’s more like your thought ends and mine begins, or I’m distracted and that itself is a kind of continuance.

AF: I echo this appreciation for the way our minds work differently. I fascinate on how we might interpret the same set of parameters so differently. We’ve talked about “task” being enough. You coined this wonderful phrase “task over longing.” What does this mean?

CF: “Task over longing” reaches back to the brilliant Rowena Richie. A few years ago I was part of her piece Dearly Gathered which interrogated how capitalism engenders longing. Since then it’s been on my mind and deeply informs my upcoming work episode. As embodied in our score, I’m keenly aware of my longing when I am in the act of going to (my spot in) the woods. Then, as soon as, or even before I arrive, I feel free of desire. I go to the woods because it’s part of my day. I think the frequency keeps me in task mode.

AF: Yes, definitely the frequency is a powerful element. And also how it can be something that you do even when you don’t feel like doing it. It’s both a comfort and a type of labor. I love the word “practice.” What does it mean to have a practice and what are we practicing? As a phrase it becomes recontextualized. So in the spirit of our non-productive approach, we are framing this article as a series of questions, which serves as a branch out of our continued conversation. We are using article writing to reveal more about our research and also to create more potential directions for future dialogue.

How and Why

Aura Fischbeck: Why is a regular improvisational practice important (to you)?

Christy Funsch: It’s the easiest way I made sense of the world, and is still the most meaningful way I have found to be in the world. It’s not that it helps formulate thought, it’s that it IS thought (thank you Susan Rethorst!). It’s a crucial way of functioning, it’s foundational.

AF: How has this practice affected/changed your SIP experience?

CF: Well, task is good for me. I was raised in a very task-based worker bee household, and I know how to function in that way. It’s grounding for me—especially task that doesn’t lead to product. The doing of it is its own reward. It’s something new in the midst of ongoingness.

AF: How is your practice sensing with the whole body at once/multiple directions?

CF: Practice sensing with the whole body at once/multiple directions. Connecting to rhythm in visual and aural fields. Quant 2020. Dealing with longitude, distance travelled; direction; time of day and weather; Beaufort scale (this is a wind tracking system); cardinal directions; Perimeter/Horizon/Locus-all as a means of locating our individual worlds.

AF: What does this mean? Does this mean making verbal lists, voice recordings, or maps?

CF: Track/same what emerges by making verbal lists, voice recordings, or maps. Repeat and/or return (to place or directives) and find something new in the midst of ongoingness.

AF: Let yourself be seen. Shake up/shred/radicalize. Forgiveness/failure.

CF: In the spirit of our non-productive approach, we are framing this article as a series of questions, which serves as a branch out of our continued conversation. We are using article writing to reveal more about our research and also to create more potential directions for future dialogue.

AF: How does your practice of harvesting? I start with whatever parameters are the start of each week, and share documentation on the last day through a shared google folder. Sometimes we are returning to things.

AF: What was the score for week 1 on 12/31/20 and 1/1/2021? Since that time we have been collaboratively creating scores and practicing a minimum of 5 days a week with a commitment to 3 months of practice.

We are documenting through images, writings, drawings, sound recordings and video recordings. Our process has been to agree on the parameters at the start of each week, and share documentation on the last day through a shared “google folder.” Sometimes we are returning to things.

Sometimes we choose slightly different areas of focus or interest, but we are always linked so that we can have an active state of receptivity: move while noticing. Receiving is an active state of noticing.

AF: The doing of it is its own reward. The doing of it is its own reward. It’s a boost for sure, and some of that boost is the not-so-simple realization that you’re doing it. You’re held to the same task. It’s like we’re co-workers. And in the sharing of data and documentation there’s a language that’s ours—we are co-authoring it as we practice. I find a lot of richness and mystery in the way minds work, and our minds work differently. I admire how you articulate your perceptions. I try on the words you use, I take them with me, almost like a puzzle of sorts, and if I start there in that thought process of deciphering, then I am led somewhere. It isn’t as casual as “Oh! Now I know what she is talking about, I’ll do that, too.” It’s more like your thought ends and mine begins, or I’m distracted and that itself is a kind of continuance.

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CF: Well, task is good for me. I was raised in a very task-based worker bee household, and I know how to function in that way. It’s grounding for me—especially task that doesn’t lead to product. The doing of it is its own reward. It’s also a way for me to give a different kind of attention to the natural world here. The woods have been my safe spot, a place for me to feel completely accepted. And that kind of acceptance makes possible a specific kind of action and risk-taking. The practice has not been as bright for me when I’m inside at home. Which is a bummer, because it is now on average about 25 degrees Fahrenheit outside!
SPACE and SITE
CF: Regarding context and space, once you mentioned the experience of taking the “private life” of the studio setting into the public, and that this was a reverse (converse?) of the pandemic making your private space at home public into the public, and that this was a reverse (converse?) of the experience of taking the “private life” of the studio setting.

AF: I have over this SIP time become increasingly aware of how, by teaching remotely from my living room, the space that I live in has now been opened up as a public space. People can see my stuff, my partner wandering into the kitchen to get a snack, etc. The formality of going to the neutral space of a studio has been something else. So part of my work now is going to various locations and letting my experience be in part about the challenge of letting myself be seen in what feels like an exposed state, and yes, I am also seeing. I work on allowing the difficulty of this to be included. Sometimes I can barely do it, and sometimes I feel totally unconcerned with whether anyone is paying attention to me.

CF: Do you approach the sites differently?
AF: It’s very pragmatic. I have a few spots close to my house that feel safe. Two of them are on the USF campus and the other is a parking ramp across the street that isn’t very busy. I think more so than approaching the location differently, it’s that each day is different - how many people are around, what is the weather like, what is my energy level. I try to stay in a state of observing and doing, and lately it has felt like something between being and performing. Duration is also a thing— sometimes I set a timer, and sometimes I tell myself to work as long as it takes to feel a change or shift of energy.

AF: You’re in a place with real winter weather. Dancing outside in snow, and frigid temperatures. How is your sense of perception affected?
CF: I grew up in upstate New York so I have roots in the body’s discomfort and psychological dread of winter. The reduction in access. And I am overwhelmed with nostalgia for and memories of winter and seasonal drama. I appreciate having to adapt. We don’t have to do much of that in Northern California. I recognize, acutely, the privileges of access I have. I have a functioning body, a job, an apartment, and a car. So I can be in my apartment moving, I can walk out the door and be in my (safe) neighborhood, and I can get in my car and go to the woods. The actual physical difficulties in working outside are welcome challenges. It’s a matter of How more than What and this for me is a comfort zone because of my allergic reaction away from content. I have to prepare and watch weather and tread carefully and push through the weight of snow to get to my spot in the woods. The quietude is actually rather seductive and becomes a prism into the sculpture, into the sculpturing of tree branches by snow and ice is breath-taking. Again, I have nothing to add to the environment, and everything to receive from it by observing. Because of the cold, I can’t sit or be in stillness for too long so and the prompt of doing while observing has been rich. I can see the ruin I bring to my spot by the marks I leave in the snow and the earth. I forgive myself for this.

SCORES and POTENTIALS
AF: What’s your approach to score making?
CF: I realize I am cautious that scores do not become content. I like the word “prompt” instead as it’s like an initial push. I sometimes think of a score as something I have to follow, complete, or fulfill. I use improvisation as a way to change my perception, heighten my perception, and attentive to perception. Often I find a prompt or score is a starting place to frame or anchor the shift in perception I am seeking. And I appreciate how words frame action. I have been enjoying our lists and collection of words. I am having fun choosing words at random, using them to frame the practice, then re-imagine them as I document or write about the session.

AF: I often think of a score as a sort of web or a map, a way to home my attention and perception but also a way to track particulars. And I both like and push against having something to follow, complete or fulfill. Again I think it comes back to task, and the rigor of ongoingness that we are inviting. If the “mind is a muscle” (Thanks again Yvonne Rainer) then dancing is certainly a state of mind. I’m loving the journey of it! Grateful for it.

AF: Are there ways this score, this practice, could involve others? How do you see that happening beyond SIP?
CF: I would love to continue to evolve this research into a cycle of score-based performance work. I love the way working with a score to develop performance work gives individual agency inside the creative process, while still placing the collaborators in a shared world or context. I can imagine the language and prompts we have developed through this practice being repurposed in a variety of capacities. I have visions of being in spaces and performers/audience/community being there and roaming about and every- one somehow being co-creators. I have no idea how this going to go post-quarantine but I do have some instincts. How about you? Has this been generative for you?

CF: I would say it has been generative in terms of the unique thoughts and perceptual shifts that emerge from the moving moment. And so, yes, in the doing of this practice I find my decision-making lays itself bare. Clarity may be fleeting but potentials arise. I trust the inevitability of this completely and bring this trust into the working room.

In conclusion, we are not concluding anything really. As we write this, our practice is still continuing, and it brings to mind the many dances and creative acts that are going on all over the world. Something about having to find ways to connect with one another through the distance conjures a longing and there is sweetness to that.
Typically seen as a form of individual expression, dance can be a form of worship, a powerful tool for passing on ritual and tradition through generations. Dance traditions, movements and songs that get passed down through generations are typically those that originate as expressions of everyday life. Nomadic tribes used dance and song to make a home wherever they were.

Dance in America began with the Indigenous peoples, as a spiritual offering to the celestials, and played a vital role in rituals and ceremonies. It also served as a medium of learning about nature and ancestors. The first waves of immigrants to the United States were from European nations, fleeing war and economic hardship. While their music and dance were distinct from each other, they originated in an era when a clear distinction existed between the dances and music of “common folk” and those of “high society” such as ballroom dance and symphonies. These were a sign of upward mobility, governed by strict etiquette and formality. Due to their sponsorship by royalty and aristocracy, these dance forms reflected the ideas and propaganda of their sponsors. The porous nature of borders helped these art forms to proliferate and became prevalent throughout Europe before being imported into the United States. This inevitably led to some artistic “cultured,” mainstreamed homogeneity. Then as now, imitation was considered the sincerest form of flattery, and the hope of upward mobility went hand in hand with the discernment and appreciation for the arts. At some point in this evolutionary pattern, dance came to mean a skill, a talent, a study used to excel in movement; an art, rather than the practice of a culture or community. The waves of immigration that followed World-War II, especially after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965 attracted a more diverse group of immigrants, those who had their own dance forms that dated back millennia and differed greatly in their music, costume, and expression from those dance forms that came from Europe. But these non-European immigrants like us have found limited “mainstream” interest in their arts.

As first generation immigrants from India who learned Bharatanatyam as a hobby, we live among a diaspora rich with a multitude of classical music and dance traditions. It was to address this fragmentation that Sangam Arts was founded in 2013. Our initial focus was on consolidating and expanding audiences for Classical Indian dance in Silicon Valley. Given the common threads that bind
these forms including a rich repertory rooted in Hindu spirituality and mythological narratives. The collaborations featuring multiple Indian classical dance forms was straightforward. In 2014, Sangam Arts presented a ground-breaking showcase of all eight classical Indian dance forms at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. Our evolution from Sangam to Mosaic

The Euro-American dance festival showcase experience brought two important realizations –
1) The richness and beauty of dance wasn’t unique to the Terasichorean talents of the Indian diaspora. The Bay Area was home to many culturally distinct communities with vibrant dance forms being practiced at the highest levels – albeit within their cultural silos.
2) Festivals are a wonderful platform for acknowledgement and representation of cultures. However, creating authentic stories for audiences with varying degrees of familiarity with the art forms and fostering a lasting connection between the communities they represent requires greater investment of time, money and purposeful curation. This awareness led us to our foray into intercultural performance. Dances of Devotion featuring traditional Cambodian classical dance master artists Chhara Bunt and Renunder Indian-Bharatanatyam exponent Lavanya Ananth. Then Came Conference of the Birds in 2016, in partnership with Enacte Arts, which brought together over 60 dancers and actors from 12 traditions ranging from Folklorico and Kathak to Hula and from 12 traditions ranging from classical Indian dance forms at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. It is encouraging to see that we are able to stem the tide of divisiveness and forced to compromise or contort their whole identity. This was not a work of fusion, where each participant was forced to compromise or comfort their personal identity, but an exploration of how our perceived audience preferences. Rather, this was a true coming together of distinct parts which retained their identities while creating a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts and quintessentially American.

Mosaic programming uses the arts to help create a sense of belonging for all who live, work, play, and pray in our community. While all of us appreciate the diversity in Silicon Valley, there remain huge pockets of segregated lives. Not everybody is inclined to the same, and a unique opportunity has made us disregard histories and has even contributed to the displacement of several communities. For example, residents who have come here from all over the world may have little to no knowledge of the traditions and communities who still live among us, and struggle to preserve and promote their cultural traditions.

We believe that culturally rooted art forms can be used to tell these hidden stories and to build bridges between people and cultures in our community. Not alone in this approach. The Long Time Project believes in building our capacity to think and plan for long-term projects and to develop cutting-edge, in-depth, and focused work and include deep time, multiple generations, and mortality consciousness, and intercultural performances that prioritize authenticity and co-creation. It is encouraging to see that we are not alone in this approach. The Long Time Project believes in building our capacity to think and plan for long-term projects and to develop cutting-edge, in-depth, and focused work and include deep time, multiple generations, and mortality consciousness, and intercultural performances that prioritize authenticity and co-creation.

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Mosaic programming uses the arts to help create a sense of belonging for all who live, work, play, and pray in our community. While all of us appreciate the diversity in Silicon Valley, there remain huge pockets of segregated lives. Not everybody is inclined to the same, and a unique opportunity has made us disregard histories and has even contributed to the displacement of several communities. For example, residents who have come here from all over the world may have little to no knowledge of the traditions and communities who still live among us, and struggle to preserve and promote their cultural traditions.

We believe that culturally rooted art forms can be used to tell these hidden stories and to build bridges between people and cultures in our community. Not alone in this approach. The Long Time Project believes in building our capacity to think and plan for long-term projects and to develop cutting-edge, in-depth, and focused work and include deep time, multiple generations, and mortality consciousness, and intercultural performances that prioritize authenticity and co-creation. It is encouraging to see that we are not alone in this approach. The Long Time Project believes in building our capacity to think and plan for long-term projects and to develop cutting-edge, in-depth, and focused work and include deep time, multiple generations, and mortality consciousness, and intercultural performances that prioritize authenticity and co-creation.

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The Euro-American dance festival showcase experience brought two important realizations –
1) The richness and beauty of dance wasn’t unique to the Terasichorean talents of the Indian diaspora. The Bay Area was home to many culturally distinct communities with vibrant dance forms being practiced at the highest levels – albeit within their cultural silos.
2) Festivals are a wonderful platform for acknowledgement and representation of cultures. However, creating authentic stories for audiences with varying degrees of familiarity with the art forms and fostering a lasting connection between the communities they represent requires greater investment of time, money and purposeful curation. This awareness led us to our foray into intercultural performance. Dances of Devotion featuring traditional Cambodian classical dance master artists Chhara Bunt and Renunder Indian-Bharatanatyam exponent Lavanya Ananth. Then Came Conference of the Birds in 2016, in partnership with Enacte Arts, which brought together over 60 dancers and actors from 12 traditions ranging from classical Indian dance forms at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival.

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UNCOMFORTABLE SWEAT DRIPS under my arms, my cheeks burning as I speak up on the panel. I challenge an application because it’s unclear how the applicant belonged to a marginalized BIPOC community and why they share stories of this community as a cis-white person. Why do I, as a person who regularly advocates for equity, have so much discomfort confronting equity issues in our dance field?

I often wonder if this unsettling is something I’m supposed to get a grip on? As a parent, I frequently hear educators speaking about students learning to regulate their bodies. As a dancer, I feel I should have better control, yet these uninvited physiological reactions startle me. Even though I am a member of Dancing Around Race, Women of Color in the Arts (WOCA), my small group Power Cirque from APAP LFP, and I’ve gotten to work through residencies like Aesthetic Shift, the physical disruption continues to have the same intensity.
During college, I had to evaluate whether I would want to be the token Asian dancer in a predominantly white or Black company or dance with a predominantly Asian company. The reality of this was reflected in my career when I began dancing with STEAMROLLER Dance Company. STEAMROLLER is a queer loud dance company of mostly Asian Americans where rehearsals brimmed with crying laughter, mockery, and sweaty cheeks. Jesselto Bie was our choreographer or who we called ‘fearless leader’ but there was no traditional hierarchy. The collective collaboration was never defined through by-laws but I felt safe. In fact, during STEAMROLLER rehearsals, and the outings following, we would mercilessly tease one another as only siblings can do. I would blush from the impact as the zinging could sting, but I couldn’t deny the truth embedded in those words or the love where it came from. During those weekend rehearsals on sidewalks, and meals shared with gravel and glass on our clothes and in our hair, we also shared the challenges of being dancers in the Bay Area which boasted a diverse dancer community but with much less diversity in institutional and choreographic leadership, a fact still true today.

Confrontations are challenging and yet I demand further equity in our field. Thankfully, affinity groups help us to better understand how to harmoniously work with personal and communal reactivity. Can I feel valid when making an observation? Can we, as a community, ask one another to do better without fear of repercussion, being labeled as difficult, or dismissed? Instead, can we call each other up to be better allies and community members?

I’ve also been thinking more about why was STEAMROLLER rehearsing on sidewalks when my rehearsals with white choreographers were in studios? STEAMROLLER’s lack of funds to pay for studio space is the practical answer. And yet, as I’ve participated on grant panels it’s made me ask questions like: Is it hard to fund culturally specific work? Is Asian American dance mostly collaborative leadership are fundable for white folks, but this issue? I wonder if the aesthetics of soft power and preservation interests? Are other cultural groups having culturally specific work? Is Asian American dance mostly made me ask questions like: Is it hard to fund collaborative leadership, a fact still true today. How would you describe Asian Babe Gang?

MALIA: Asian Babe Gang (ABG) is six friends within the asian diaspora who found each other through various dance projects and started unpacking our shared and individual experiences. We just kept hanging out and sharing our stories. I think engaging with race and identity can feel really isolating, and I personally was seeking witnesses and empathy in that process. We also know that Asian people have been strategically used by the forces of white supremacy to reinforce anti-Blackness and we strive to coalition build with our Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other friends towards mutual liberation. The name ABG wrecks the “asian baby girl” trope, which is rooted in the appropriation of Blackness and also depends on the monolithic stereotype of Asian women being a certain way.

KIM: ABG is a group of dance artists, multi-media artists, healers (AiAno+Melissa), a mathematician (Nina), writers, poets, stand up comedian (Malia), vertical dancer/typographer extraordinaire (Rose) and I could PROBABLY GO ON. Each of us has been in someone else’s rehearsal process or sharing our cultural experiences at a Dialogue (on Diaspora) at Nina’s Home (pre-pandemic). What I noticed in dance rehearsals with other Asian folks was how comforted I felt having discussions about our bodies, our herstories in ways that resonated with each other rather than just acknowledgement.

AIANO: Echoing everything already said, and adding that, for me, ABG is also about learning how to build solidarity within the Asian diaspora. Within the United States, we are categorized into a monolith of “Asian American,” but there is a complex history of colonization, imperialism, and war between many of our ancestral homes (Japan, China, Philippines, Korea, etc.). For me, ABG is an attempt to begin to explore the question, “How do we build solidarity against white-supremacy, while also facing the complex reality that as a Japanese person, my ancestors were responsible for colonization, genocide, and imperial violence against the ancestors and ancestral lands of my current comrades?” White-supremacy runs deep and we must address its manifestations at every level.

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MELISSA: In my experience, I didn’t encounter ‘Asian American dance’ until my twenties - when I’d moved to San Francisco. I distinctly remember Googling “Asian American Dance SF” … Lenora Lee Dance and Lily Cai Dance Company came up in my search. Yay, it existed here! But I really had to seek it out myself. Another big moment for me was when Shen Wei came from New York to show ‘Undivided Divided’ at YBCA. There are so many predecessors to ABG that we wish to name, acknowledge, connect with, learn from, recruit into ABG; but the followup observation is: there are not that many ‘mainstream’ examples. That’s where the white supremacy of the dance world shows up— keeping us in competition or isolation from each other instead of in relationship with.

KIM: As a youngin’ growing up between New Zealand and the United States, Asian American Dance Work was traditional Chinese Ribbon Dancing and anything that was on a variety show that my mum would watch on the television. I remember Asian American Dance Work seemed...
MALIA: wwwwww kim, so appreciate this reference. It makes me realize that I grew up idolizing Melody Lacayanga— the season I runner up of So You Think You Can Dance. That must have been the first time I saw an Asian, let alone Filipino, person occupying any explicitly “Asian” dance space, or probably any dance space at all. I also have a memory of going to see a Shen Wei performance when I was in high school. It’s funny because someone I looked up to as a young dancer from the local dance community had joined the company at that point (a white person) and looking back, I was excited by this aesthetic that was distinctively not western, yet there were mostly/only white (and tall, lithe) people onstage. So I was like, “where do I fit into this…?”

AIANO: I also grew up with very little Asian-American representation in dance and the representation I did have was usually within the context of an Asian dancer fitting into the white, eurocentric aesthetic of a tall, thin, cis-het, dainty feminine dancer. Moving to the bay was also my first time seeing Asian-American dancers who were addressing issues directly related to their experience as dancers, not ignoring it. However, I was always craving to see more of myself, as a queer, big bodied, non-binary person, represented. I am still craving that, which is why I’m so grateful ABG is making space for that.

Where did you grow up and were you involved in a cultural/arts/athletics/program?

KIM: I grew up in Wellington, New Zealand and eventually moved to Cupertino, California where I wanted to play AYSO Soccer with all the other kids, but my mum was restrictive about the activities I participated in. She wanted me to participate in more “feminine forms” of activity warning me that soccer would make my legs too muscular. So with lots of negotiating, I was finally able to take a dance class once a week and join the cross country team in Middle School. Jokes on my mum because my legs still got muscular! By high school, I moved to Honolulu, Hawai‘i, and naturally as an angsty teenager, participated in theatre in High School and in Chinatown (the arts district) doing long form improv theatre and Hawai‘i’s Shakespeare Festival. Hawai‘i is unique in that Asians are the majority, so I saw representation all around me in the arts.

MELISSA: I grew up in Massachusetts performing with a traditional Chinese Dance group, but that space didn’t ever acknowledge the wholeness of our individual experiences. Instead of being a space to support each other and process our identities, I feel it actually reinforced some hierarchical, ableist values of beauty while trying to ‘preserve’ Chinese culture (which isn’t inherently a bad thing). I made some of my closest friendships there and learned a lot of Chinese technique, but I don’t think I got any closer to understanding myself in that space. Younger me longed to be accepted, but I was always struggling with my sense of belonging (as a biracial white and Chinese person often read as white).

NINA: Somehow, my Chinese parents ended up in southwest Florida, where I was often the only Asian person anywhere I went. That led to a lot of internalized racism, resentment and shame towards my heritage, and a very strong desire to be white. I distinctly remember wanting to look like Shirley Temple and role play the Pink Power Ranger, refusing to play the Yellow Ranger. I remember my friends growing up “complimenting” me saying that they sometimes forgot that I was Asian (because I was so good at “playing American” making space for that).

whiteness”). Being enrolled in dance studios starting at the age of 8 and onward, I took on more white goals in my movements (ballet, pointe, lyrical, jazz, and a season of clogging LOL) where the messages of whiteness, gender performance/roles, and body politics were only reinforced. So all the dance that I’ve pursued as an adult has come with an underlying imposter syndrome of wondering if this dance is really for me, and if I belong in that space. This is all to say that it’s been my work in adulthood to undo all that internalized white-supremacy and learn how to honor, build connection, and fall in love with being Chinese, while also challenging and undoing the oppressive parts of that identity (anti-Blackness, body-shaming, misogyny, homophobia, etc.).

AIANO: I grew up in Portland, OR and attended Japanese Immersion school from 3rd – 8th grade. I had access to learning Japanese language and parts of Japanese history. However, while I was part of this program I always viewed Japanese culture as “other” because the rest of my life was in white, American culture. I saw my “Asianness” as a point of shame and difference until I was in my third year of college and began to learn about systemic racism.

MALIA: I love that, definitely identify with soft power, personally. I’m not sure that’s what I call it in my brain though, because I find softness inherently powerful even though it might seem like an oxymoron, there’s definitely a tenderness with which we approach this work and each other.

ROSE: Agreed! There is a tenderness in the way we approach each other and any work we do. At the heart of ABG, we are all dancers with personal creative practices. For most of us, the entry point into being in relationship with each other was through movement—a rehearsal or dance class. We met each other as bodies before anything else. I’m curious in exploring how this body-first connection impacts how we build strategy towards collective liberation and dismantling white supremacy. It feels like a powerful entry point and place to build foundation from.

“I’M CURIOUS IN EXPLOREING HOW THIS BODY–FIRST CONNECTION IMPACTS HOW WE BUILD STRATEGIES TOWARDS COLLECTIVE LIBERATION AND DISMANTLING WHITE SUPREMACY.”—Rose

I’ve noticed that Asian Babe Gang harnesses their soft power in the videos and IG posts. What are you interested in exploring? Do you also define this as soft power? Or is it something entirely different?

MALIA: Where did you grow up and were you involved in a cultural/arts/athletics/program? What made your experience as a dancer and representation for Asian Americans so restrictive in your childhood? We each had our own identity journeys, and yours speaks to the ways in which growing up as a mixed-race person can be restrictive and unfulfilling. In my dance training, my body was on a ‘femme’ track, a path sort of reserved for white, tall and lithe women. Where was your cultural identity in your dance training? How did you work to find your voice as an Asian American dancer? What were some of the obstacles you faced?

NINA: I think the idea of ‘Asian’ representation is often conflated with ‘American’ representation (a tall, white dancer) and as a result, I was often left out or left only in roles that were more stereotypically non-Asian. I grew up feeling I didn’t fit into any of the white, eurocentric stereotypes of beauty. In high school, I remember wanting to look like Shirley Temple and role play the Pink Power Ranger, refusing to play the Yellow Ranger. I remember my friends growing up “complimenting” me saying that they sometimes forgot that I was Asian (because I was so good at “playing American”). I’m curious in exploring how this body-first connection impacts how we build strategy towards collective liberation and dismantling white supremacy. It feels like a powerful entry point and place to build foundation from.

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“THERE IS NO PERFECT MOMENT TO SHARE. IF YOUR HEART IS BEATING FAST, TAKE IT AS A SIGN: YOU HAVE SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO SAY THAT SOMEONE NEEDS TO HEAR.” —Melissa

ever needs it (while specifically centering the experiences of queer people, femmes, women, nonbinary and trans folks, and dancers/artists). When we were deciding on our identity, it was somewhat to include "babe" in it because then we claim babe-ness along with Asianness. So I kind of feel like if you are Asian and self identify as a babe then you’re in ABG. And that being said, it’s also important to have like if you are Asian and self identify as a babe then you’re in ABG. And that being said, it’s also important to have a group of Asian Artists at various points in their careers who want to nurture/support artists like me. Conversely there is a lot to learn from each other as the challenges that younger generations of artists face are similar and some of the challenges are very different—one being that the econ- omy around art-making in the 90s is very different than the last 5 years in the Bay Area. AADA is an organisation that can affirm Asian American artists and support them in their pursuit of creating and supporting longevity in our careers. In the growth, the momentum in my work is driven by a residency or my putting aside finances to produce work. I would like to see how our Asian Artist community can grow through affirmative spaces/support systems.

Melissa: I distinctly remember this small moment a few of us shared in a rehearsal process for Clarissa Ko’s ‘five feet dance’ — we all had a collective realization that NONE of us had never been in a creative process with 100% Asian Diaspora collaborators. I return to this sim- ple moment (that turned into hours of followup discus- sion) often because it reminds me how important it is to build support and capacity from an internal, affinity space (i.e. with other Asian Americans)—in order to step up in coalition with others, as Malta is saying.

Nina: I think you know the answer to this question the moment you’re in any affinity group/spaces (whether it’s by race, sexuality, gender identity, parenting status, what- ever it is). In this case, it is queer Asian female dance art- ists). Echoing Melissa’s memory of being brought together and sharing space and process for the first time in five feet dance, the absence of feeling othered in a contemporary dance space was very striking. By removing just that one layer of whiteness, there’s a sense of release and permis- sion to let go (of performing, accommodating, proving that I belong, assimilating). And then, once you see what that’s like, you can’t unsee it and you realize how important it is to nourish your self, identity, lineage, and connec- tion to ancestors. And then building and feeding into a larger AADA community feels like a natural extension, so we may see/be seen, heal, process, interrogate, challenge, build, share resources/history, and surface our connective tissue that exists within this specific slice of identity.

Why is an AADA (Asian American Dance Affinity) group important to you?

What is your best group agreement?

Rose: “I am responsible for myself, my reactions, my own needs” “show up however you need, however feels best.” “crying is okay!”

Melissa: “There is no perfect moment to share. If your heart is beating fast, take it as a sign: you have something important to say that someone else needs to hear.”

KIM: Our group agreement: come as you are with the parts of yourself that you are ready and/or want to share with the group. This is a space where you can ask ques- tions, make mistakes, and not worry about failing or being wrong. There is a space here for you to be held. Our group agreement is a living agreement.

How do you want to show up for each other?

Rose: With ferocious tenderness. with love. listening to our own and each others’ capacities. Asking for what we need, want, and dream of. Deep, active listening and patience. Maintaining check-ins and communication through ups, downs and inbetweens. encouraging and supporting each others’ imaginations, holding each other after a hard day or a sweaty dance class. Listening to our ancestors and those who have come before.

Melissa: I see this image of us all wrapping and eat- ing dumplings together. Nourishing each other, using our hands, in motion together, with enough abundance to spare and share with others. As a chosen family, with constant invitations to each bring our unique gifts into our work together. With joy, lightness, and deep trust.

Malia: With the capacity to really see each other in each new moment and with trust that it’s reciprocal. With lots of laughter! With the knowledge that Kim and I are probably going to start singing a 2000’s pop song. Defi- nitely with dumplings and luxurious love, and our ances- tors’ support.

Nina: I love what Rose said earlier about how most of us met in a body-first way. I think that dynamic has set the tone/framework for ABG. We listen to more than words or deliberately shared information. I really believe that we can feel each other - energetically, spiritually, and through our ancestors.

KIM: I would like to show up with space for others to take if they need, an offering—joke, story, laughter, and undying sensitivity for one another. I show up for the women in my family who came before me—my grand- mother who worked in the fields researching Malaria, my mother who taught me her kind of strength, and to show up for myself and understand that familial sacrifices made for me don’t direct the story of my life.

Aiano: I want to show up in fullness, which to me means everyone being able to show up where they’re at. I’ve been struggling with depression and appreciate that I’m able to show up in whatever my fullness is that day. The other day, that was in bed with the blankets up to my nose. But space was still held for me and I was able to participate in that state. I want this space to be one not of perfection or professionalism, but one of authenticity and fullness at whatever state we’re in.

Hearing ABG articulate their process and project makes my heart full and I am inspired to keep thinking about the legacy and future of Asian American dancers and choreog- raphers from the Bay. Next, I’ll be interviewing Claudine Nagano about Asian American Dance Performances and how we can disrupt funding structures so we see more culturally specific groups get funding, and why re-granting doesn’t work. I’ll also be speaking with Melecio Estrella on developing an Asian American Dancers’ Affinity Group with ABG.
slow, sticky, sustainable

Built with integrity, openness, abundance, and commitment to the continuous ongoing, neverending work of traveling toward that beautiful horizon of liberation.
Scarcity is built into the very fabric of some of our fields. I know that there are movement- and body-based communities who have and will continue to practice from a place of abundance, but for the vast majority, scarcity is in the metaphorical water that we drink. We have enough love to go around, but we’ve been conditioned to believe that there aren’t enough financial resources, dance, choreographic desire, fellowship opportunities, or critics to review our work. We’ve been taught that if we don’t get recognized in our youth by lists that name them under 25 or under “to watch,” we have missed out. We underpay ourselves and overwork in the name of the Art, only to end up in some kind of unspoken, unhealthy competition, in which no one actually wins anything. I’ve heard so many metaphors about creating a seat at the table to solve issues in inequity, in part because we’ve been told as much, but I’m not sure the work through the invisible labor and the cousin of scarcity. There is an invisibilizing that happens when you exist at the intersections of marginalized identities that plays into bigger underlying issues about taking, reciprocity, and scarcity. When I reflect on being asked to do labor for equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts, I frequently am left with a feeling of being mined for knowledge or approval. I witness the ways in which service-oriented artists around me were making performances about grief—embodiment it, processing it, living with it—and I was too. I was re-entering dance after a major injury and all I could think about was the grief I was holding like a tightly wound coil in my body. I could see so clearly the struggle to have enough in these works. It makes sense that patterns like this one emerge. We are living in the same world, witnessing the same crises of migration, climate change, poverty, racial inequity, and now, a global pandemic that was grossly mismanaged and took the lives of over half a million people in the US alone. So many of us understand our experiences of the world around us through movement and making. Like the number of performances tackling grief, I’ve been noticing words like decolonization and anti-racism being used to describe work being done artistically and administratively in the dance ecosystem. Without tangible action to substantiate these claims. Recently, I’ve been learning that artists are shifting their attention away from the process of making art and more toward what I’ve heard referred to as “resource sharing” and “mentorship.” Recently, I’ve seen calls for QTBPOC Board Members and public equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility statements on websites and social media accounts. Recently, I’ve been waning in enthusiasm, a metaphorical throwing up of hands demanding “haven’t we done any of it yet?” I know that the intention is good, but the impact is not all QTBPOC festivals under a white-led organization’s name. Liberation is handing over resources. It is giving up power. It is sitting out grant cycles. It is using clout and influence to change the system. What’s difficult is that equity work, or even just being committed to being a good person, goes unseen, nobody gives you a cookie to keep going when you have steadily and sustainably been in it for a long time. The cooks are given to the most emotionally performative (frequently unsustainable) displays of solidarity in hiring, programming, demographics. And I’m sure that getting that cookie feels good, but the cookie will not feed and nourish the work to keep going long term. The pursuit of integrity and transparency toward cultural change is a thankless mission. Instead of offering thanks to those who have been in the work for decades, I see the co-opting of niceness as adequate, more opaque than ever. Nevertheless, this mission is necessary. And just to be clear, I do not want a cookie. I want lasting, sustainable, cultural change where the needs of the most marginalized are centered. I will leave you with this. I am burnt out because of the emotional, financial, and cultural labor and pressure I’ve been under to create, support, and demand equity in our field and how that is undervalued and invisibilized. But I’m not going to change; I am always going to give this much because I believe in our capacity for a better future. I can’t help but think that if we want a real revolution then it is important to give up more than we ever have before. Isn’t real abundance believing that there is plenty for all of us? Angela Davis reminds us that “you have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.” So I ask you, dear reader, what are you most afraid of giving up when it comes to the changing world, and how will you work through that fear for a future where we practice liberation as a horizon toward which we collectively aspire but do not expect to arrive? We are ready. Let’s get messy.

BHUMI PATEL is a queer, desi artist/activist. Her work involves dance, choreographing, curating, editing, and acting as a purveyor for liberation, with the time and space to decolonize the body. She is a member of Dancing Around Race and Wandering Artists. She’s been published in the San Francisco Chronicle, Life as a Modern Dancer, Contact Quarterly, and in Dance. BHUMI@dancesworks.org
AD INFINITUM IDENTITIES
THE WORK OF PSEUDA AND KIM IP

PIECE DAU CAN BE SEEN FROM A STAGE, holding two metal chain ropes attached to the limbs of another body. A doll, a dancer, Kim Ip. It’s Halloween, 2015, at Bablab Gallery, and the audience doesn’t yet know that Kim and Pseuda are chained together until they begin to stretch away, the chains syncing a nexus between bodies. Kim is the marionette. She adorns a black, strappy makeshift harness fashioned of seatbelt material that cages her torso like external ribs. Attached to the back of her are the metal chains controlled by Pseuda. Kim struggles to escape the chained confines that contort and pivot her movements. Her improvised dance vocabulary avers free will against the puppeteering dominance of Pseuda, who expertly jostles Kim. Her master. Then the dominance inverts and the Doll can be seen controlling Pseuda. She throws them violently to the floor. “I’m Your Doll” by FKA Twigs accentuates the sparring as the movement fractures notions of control. The performer’s identities are exported and stretched in situ, surmising agency to that which was assumed to be a chained doll. But what traps the doll’s identity is the same mechanism that may set her free.

NICK NAVARRO’S DRAG IDENTITY—Pseuda—was born out of San Francisco’s SOMA nightlife milieu. While he never considered himself a performer, he frequented The Stud and rejoiced in queer mediations of identity. Pre-pandemic, the city’s queer nightlife aesthetics were a haven of experimental drag looks comprising the fabulous, the surreal, the abstract, the morbid—myriad identity transformations partying in unison. As Nick tells me, “Drag is an art form where you can literally do anything you want. The SOMA drag scene showed me there are no rules, and that was a big part of me discovering and making my queer identity.”

IN 2014 NICK BEGAN EXPERIMENTING with creepy horror drag concepts. Blacked out teeth and white-out contacts. Dystopian characters and science fiction aesthetics. Blood and glitter. From there his alias, Pseuda, spawned and began performing throughout the city’s queer nightlife—often, alongside Jader and urheinous, as the offbeat drag trio Toxic Waste Face. One performance installation from the trio embodied them as zoned-out adult babies confined to wooden cribs glued to personal television monitors, complete with streams of incoherent media footage bleeding into one another. “We were embodying the crippling infantilization that technology can often wield over the human psyche through themes of technological isolation, control, the sort of phantom limb attachment to our devices,” Nick explains.

AS AN ARTIST, Pseuda uses avatars to mediate their own identity to investigate the nefarious effects of technology on the human psyche, and our curation of the self. With Drag, Nick could embody anyone or anything he curated. Pseuda emerged as a self-evident slave to the ever-growing techno-voyeurism of the work of Pseuda and Kim Ip by Justin Ebrahemi

PHOTO BY: THIS PAGE: (TOP): TAKEOVER TOKYO, (BOTTOM) COURTESY OF ARTIST, OPPOSITE PAGE: (TOP) DAVID DURIE, (BOTTOM) SKIN
KIM AND NICK were quick to discover their overlapping motifs. One of their first major collaborations was through Kim’s residency at SAFEhouse for the Arts in 2016. “I think we always knew we had similar aesthetic tastes in art. I was like, ‘oh this person can visualize what I’m saying. So working together feels very comfortable.” As her bio reads, Kim Ip (aka Krimm) uses her choreography to undermine the stereotypes and expectations of the performing women’s body as it relates to American Pop Culture.” Kim’s work “critiques the mediated gaze of women’s bodies in the media by creating alternate experiences on stage.”

One night in 2016, Kim and Nick revealed their overlapping motifs. One of Nick/Pseuda’s dances at Shawl-Anderson, SAFEHouse for the Arts, and CounterPulse. Her work investigates the mediated image and the concept of the video vixen, who is at once celebrity and social interaction, and so we find deeper comfort in social media for the affirmation of our identities and our work. “There’s a value judgment that happens in my head,” Nick reflects, “Then I begin to analyze my work based on likes...it’s just strange. The struggle is to be liked and feel seen.”

“IT WAS ABOUT THE VIDEO VIXEN,” Kim explains. “We placed a mover inside the box to show the entrapment of an identity that people project onto. The video vixen is widely seen in the media, dancing in hip hop music videos or video games. The public idea has a projected idea about who that person is, how they live their life, what decisions they make. So they’re trapped. But my goal in making the piece is showing that there’s so much complexity to that body, their pleasures, and their athleticism that can move in dynamic ways.”

Kim’s work at Babelab foreshadowed future collaborations with Nick/Pseuda that examined the video vixens in our selfie camera. Now, in March 2021 — a year into the pandemic — digital media’s voyeuristic capacity has expanded in deeper facets of everyday life. The new norm for many of us is to be devoid of live social interaction, and so we find deeper comfort in social media for the affirmation of our identities and our work. “There’s a value judgment that happens in my head,” Nick reflects, “Then I begin to analyze my work based on likes...it’s just strange. The struggle is to be liked and feel seen.”

“A YEAR LATER,” Kim & Nick collaborated on Steep in Here, as part of Babelab’s VITAL HYBRIDS performance showcase at Gray Area. In this work a large white cube enclosed dancers who moved within the confines of their contoured identities, while silhouettes of other bodies were projected onto the white box. Shadows were emulating reality and attempting to learn from the dancers, as bewildered voyeurs in the audience tried to distinguish mediated outlines from their organic origin.

“THIS ECHO CHAMBER” became the basis for Nick and Kim’s work, erre:zero, as part of CounterPulse’s 2021 Combustible Residency culminating on-site and virtually this April. The work coalesces towering video monitors into a circular perimeter surrounding the dancers. Designed by co-collaborator and creative technologist Taurin Barrera, the panopticon surveils and absorbs the choreographed identity, as large monitors track and regurgitate live movements. “In this space, organic movement is but an echo of the past, remembered through the flicker of screens,” as the work description reads.

“You have to also consider the tools that are being provided by the platform too,” Kim adds. “The tools on Instagram nurture an environment where we seek a semi celebrity status.” As the pandemic progresses, so does use of social media. While some artists affirm the vitality of rest and stress the need to not strain our days for constant production; others constantly produce, share, and engage. Collaborations rehearse in virtual space, adapt, livestream their art with refreshed technological tools. And this output, as always, is saturated in the mass manufacturing of curated identities, (un)willingly mediated, manipulated, and stretched beyond that original post. “We’re all watching our curated lives that we’re sharing with each other. We’re predicting the way we’re all watching each other, and unconsciously this alters how we engage with the world.”

Nick observes. His vision of an augmenting techno-voyeurism evokes Neo in The Matrix, who wakes up in a pod of installed screens neighboring additional pods that span ad infinitum. “It’s what I call the microcosm. It’s a dystopian machinescape where we’re all individually isolated.” Identities in these pods are curated, distorted, and feedback endlessly to ourselves.
THE DANCERS ARE CONFINED by these screens," Nick describes. "And they're literally trapped in this little instal-
ation where they watch each other. The lights black out, and when they come back you see a different dancer in the space, almost as if you, the audience member, have been transported to a different pod."
The time sequences of movement and projection are delayed, bodies disappear and reappear in space, identities merge and duplicate in multiplicity.

The choreographic elements in are:era emerged through Zoom rehearsals, a self-aware gridlock of dancers tracking each other's movements. Dance scores were puzzle pieces into a collective work. "It was fasci-
nating," Kim recalls. "The rehearsals were a struggle of looking through 'telephone foot-
age' and realizing that I'm seeing identities in front of me manipulated by each other. I'm seeing some kind of phenomena happening and I have no idea how to track any of this. It's similar to sifting through massive online content and not knowing where you are."

The screened collaborations evolved throughout the pandemic into socially dis-
tanced rehearsals at CounterPulse and Zoom call work-in-progresses. The Combustible Residency's time frame doubled in length — as does the obsession with meta celebrity status — to a collective work. "It was fasci-
nating, " Nick elaborates. "There are many good things like human connection, shar-
ing resources, and the representation of different people. But all of these things are fed into the algorithms and tracked by the technology, and by us too."

Three months into the New Year, artists and audiences continue to rely on social media to experience art, collabor-
ate and connect, and observe one another. Arts institu-
tions, too, ideate on novel digital engagement strategies, tracking cultural shifts; their branded identities, adapting. As many are increasingly reliant on digital tools, mental health and social media experts warn of the dangers of too much screen time. Numerous articles populate offering neurological explorations of Zoom fatigue and tips to alle-
viate the strain. Many feel oversaturated and delete their social media accounts for week-
s. Yet, as the protagonist of curated identities, social media users also find catharsis and a sense of belonging through digital participation. The same tools that entrap and me-
diate identities also spread vital resources and awareness, calls to action, and representation of marginalized individ-
uals that can literally save lives.

Viewing Pseuda's Instagram account, only one photo can be seen of Nick Navarro not in drag. The rest of the grid is an invigorating display of ghoulish looks, metal harnesses, algae wires, A.I, and electricity. In one video, Pseuda wears a helmet fashioned from barbed wire that wraps their head like a Venus flytrap. Their torso is covered in a leather harness, and a beam of light is projection mapped to their chest — cracking open with changing shades of scarlet as they lip sync "Doomed" by Moses.

I feel you
But nobody else
Though you're someone I can't see
Not you say nothing
Of the abysm suffering
That struts lukewarm in me
If liveliness is godlessness
Will you lead me to the wayside?

WHILE DIGITAL SATURATION only grows more pervasive — as does the obsession with meta celebrity status — to ascribe a techno-voyeurism analysis to just the most recent technological tools is falsehood. Writings of technology's role in constructing identities are as old as the advent of television, "Think of Leave It to Beaver," Nick explains. "Like, this is what you should model your life after, white, cis, hetero, nuclear family with christian morals. Then everyone gets a TV set and models themselves after this suburban life. Art imitates life... So there's this looping of people modeling people who are modeling television. And with the internet, the looping increases at a rapid speed. It's dizzying, are:era explores this phenomena."

Nick and Kim don't inherently prescribe pessimism to our techno-voyeurism stasis. "I don't have a strong moral position but err on the side of skepticism," Nick elaborates. "There are many good things like human connection, shar-
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ALLIANCE FOR CALIFORNIA TRADITIONAL ARTS

The Alliance for California Traditional Arts promotes and supports ways for cultural traditions to thrive now and into the future by providing advocacy, resources, and connections for folk and traditional artists and their communities.

NAKA DANCE THEATRE

NAKA Dance Theater and Pacifc Arts Alliance continue their Live Arts in Resistance series, in collaboration with Amara Tabor-Smith, as she instigates conversations that flirt with magic, failure, rage, and freedom—all while surrendering to the unexpected creative spirit of the moment. Tuesdays, Apr 6 & 20.

Acto de Memoria / Act of Memory (June 2021) is a series of virtual talks, performances, and an art installation about NAKA Dance Theater’s BUSCARTE project, a multi-year inquiry into the struggle to remain visible: to counteract the power structures of forced erasure.

BE EXCEPTIONAL

Lynda Green began leading recreational classes for individuals with exceptional needs out of her family’s dance studio in Antioch, California 15 years ago. The “buddy” system Lynda has established at Be Exceptional provides volunteers and participants the opportunity to grow together.

MUSEUM OF DANCE

Museum of Dance celebrates the universal art of dance through innovative exhibitions and diverse educational programs. Immerse yourself into their recently launched podcast, MODPOD, that explores the voices, stories, and history of dance as they interview artists, choreographers, and educators in the field.

Kiandanda Dance Theater

Based in San Francisco, Kiandanda Dance Theater presents works between the USA, France, and Congo. Artistically directed by Byb Bibene, the company produces creative performance projects, Mbongui Square Festival, and Tracing Africa Circle-African Dance Histories and Philosophies.

COMMUNITY

D.A.M. EVENTS

Since 2010, DAM Events has provided developing artists the opportunities they need to strengthen and showcase their talent. The #DAMdigital series presents dance demos, live performances, makeup tutorials, cooking segments, and more.

RHYTHM & MOTION

At Rhythm & Motion, they believe that anyone can dance and offer fun, high energy dance workout classes for everyone! Activities include livestream and free recorded classes with outdoor classes coming soon. Sign up for their newsletter to receive updates.

DANCING POETRY FESTIVAL

The Dancing Poetry Festival provides uplifting, thought-provoking, artistic entertainment for an audience of all ages with performances that feature a wide range of poetry and dance genres.

SHANICE WHITTAKER

Soul Movement encourages and uplifts the community through dance and holistic arts. Founder Shanice Whittaker offers instruction in praise dance, creative movement and fitness classes. This season she directs the annual spiritually-uplifting D.O.P. Experience during Easter weekend, Sat, April 3.

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO DANCE PROGRAM
The University of San Francisco offers a rigorous course of study within the Performing Arts and Social Justice major where students learn how to combine their passion for dance with their desire to make a positive impact on their communities. Join the 50th Anniversary Festival – Breathe Room – Wed, Apr 21 – Sat, May 1.

LEELA ACADEMY
Leela Academy presents the Interview Series: The Making of the California Gharana that brings to life the stories of how Pandit Chitresh Das’ influential and unique lineage of kathak developed over the course of four decades. Learn more about Das’ senior disciples as well as musical artists who emerged from this treasured era of North Indian classical art in the SF Bay Area.

Alive & Well Productions
Led by Annie Kahane, Alive & Well Productions is a shape-shifting group of artists who collaborate to create performances made of movement, language and song. Kahane recently released a poetry chapbook “No Time Like the Present to Be”; all profits are donated to Youth Speaks.

Dandelion Dance theatre
Dandelion Dance theatre collaborates with CSU East Bay for the first Inclusive Performance Festival, a grass-roots, DIY, radically inclusive, process-oriented gathering. Apr 6-May 8.

James Graham Dance Theatre
James Graham Dance Theatre started in 2010 to present original dance theatre work that deals with universal experiences. They are currently engaging with a remote residency at Kenyon College in Ohio with Graham creating a new work for the graduating seniors. James also teaches Gaga movement classes weekly.

KELLITA MALOOF/SHOWGIRL AWAKENING
Congratulations to Showgirl Awakening’s founder Kellita Maloof on her debut book, How To Create A Burlesque Solo ... From the Inside Out, a guidebook for creating a conscious burlesque solo, written with highly sensitive souls in mind.

SF DANCE GEAR
SF Dance Gear has moved! Check out their new location at 551 Hayes Street or shop online. Book your shopping window or shoe fitting appointment through their website.

WHEN EYES SPEAK
When Eyes Speak is the first Indian Choreography Festival in SF connecting audiences to combinations of theater, mythology, and movement through outreach programs, curated performances, panel discussions, and more. Join the next lecture demonstration collaboration with UCR Dance Program on April 16.
**Santa Rosa Dance Theater**

Santa Rosa Dance Theater welcomes all ages, from tiny dancers and advanced students to adult students, inspiring each one to envision a future in dance.

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**The Beat**

The Beat-BPA offers a comprehensive experience focused on diverse dance art forms and cultural experiences—Jazz, Latin dance, samba, ballet, line dance, swing, AfroCuban and rhythm tap. Our mission is to provide the highest quality of diverse educational dance and cultural experience for our students.

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**detour dance**

detour dance’s Tiny Dance Film Festival returns with a virtual slate of short dance films from around the world, April 19-26. The festival prioritizes works made by and for marginalized communities including a special screening of detour dance’s The Nelken Line—an ambitious project to replicate Pina Bausch’s historic choreography with a gorgeous cast of local Bay Area drag artists and queer performers.

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**Community IN**

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**Tiny Dance Film Festival**

APRIL 19-26, 2021
ONLINE

PHOTO BY AMANDA LANE

COURTESY OF THE BEAT

DANCE FOR ALL BODIES

Established in 2019, Dance for All Bodies is a non-profit providing welcoming and accessible, pay-what-you-can virtual dance classes for people of all abilities in an effort to dismantle ableism in dance. The Instructor Interview Series delves into the background of the instructors that are part of the online programming.

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**www.queerlatindancefestival.com**

**June 5 & 6**

Virtual Event

3RD ANNUAL QUEER AFRO-LATIN DANCE FESTIVAL
“did you eat yet?”
ma would ask
“did you eat yet?”
ma would ask
“An gì chưa?”
sunset, at a busy intersection, swollen ankles, working infinite, ma freezes time, and asks
passing by her, separate paths, ma bends gravity, and asks
even sitting, already eating at the dinner table, she’d ask

as if she did not need to know if it rained
if it poured
if the world was ending
she would say
“did you eat yet?”

and i eating, eating at her words
eating at her sustained, uninterrupted, unrelenting, perpetual, persistent, ceaselessness effort
taking for granted the ten thousand times she had asked
pouring her every ounce of love, into soft beds of turmeric noodles. ‘Mì Quảng’ cuddled with shy crescent intimate shrimp. ‘Bún bò Huế’ hot spas of lemongrass beef but preferred chicken soup, angry roasted bell pepper jalapeno dated salmon shouting over saucy-sauteed-selflessness grains of bountiful brown rice ‘Cơm tấm’

and she asks and asks and asks
and i eat and eat and eat
until full to my throat, too full,
pushing words and courage to my throat
i ask
“would you dance with me?”

“Ăn gì chưa?”

SEAN DORSEY DANCE
AT-HOME SEASON
April 16-18, 2021
FREE (donations welcome)

“Igniting the flame of compassion in the fullness of love, passion, and commitment to dance,” says Dance’s editor in chief, Sean Dorsey. “This is the perfect time to celebrate the joy of dance. It’s the perfect moment to experience our new at-home season.”

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Audio recorded and edited by Andréa Spearman, Dancers’ Group Artist Resource Manager

HIEN HUYNH was born in Da Nang, Vietnam. Through the sacrifices, hardship, and journey of his parents, Hien dedicates his artistic and living practices to share their story to the oceanic constellation of narratives. As a teaching artist and performer, he is committed to support the generation of now and beyond to contribute to human compassion, love, and interconnectedness. He is honored to have performed in the works of Lenora Lee Dance, Kim Epifano, Robert Moses’ Kin, Kinetic Arts, PUSH, O.R.D.E.R, and punkkiCO. Reflecting with immense gratitude for the sharing and generosity of the bay area and beyond, he wishes you all a year full of well beingness, joy, and kindling of flame. hien-huynh.com

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WITH FROM CONTAINMENT TO EXPANSION ABDProductions /Skywatchers Ensemble marks a decade of radical community-centered art making in the Tenderloin. This work heralds a future in which we celebrate, illuminate, and amplify what is powerful and unique in our most disinvested neighborhood. In honor of this work, we invited poet and GLIDE’s Minister of Celebration Marvin K. White to reflect and prospect with ABD/Skywatchers on the work of Skywatchers and this upcoming multidisciplinary performance piece.

The seed does not contain the flower. The sun does not contain the fire. The eye does not contain the vision. The body does not contain the dance. The mouth does not contain the song. The knee does not contain the prayer. The pencil does not contain the testimony. The spark does not contain the fire. The eye does not contain the tear. The ore does not contain the iron. The iron does not contain the chain. The tree does not contain the lynching. The blackness does not contain the danger. The wing does not contain the flight. The moon does not contain the howl. The desert does not contain the sand. The water does not contain the ocean. The ocean does not contain the water. The machete does not contain the cut. The cane does not contain the sugar.

CONTAINMENT ZONE: A complex conjunction of high crime and civic neglect common to low-income urban areas around the world. Borders of urban containment zones are enforced by a combination over-policing at the periphery and under-policing within, with hostile design of public space enforcing these borders.

The tongue does not contain the lie. The gun does not contain the murder. The circle does not contain the infinity. The path does not contain the way. The silence does not contain the nothingness. The stone does not contain the monument. The end does not contain the totality. The library does contain the gods. The universe does contain the galaxies. The neutrality does not contain the peace. The future does not contain the past. The past does not contain the future. The bone does not contain break. The suffering does not contain the blessing. The survival does not contain blessing. The recovery does not contain the blessing. The pitch does not contain the tar. The hit does not contain the run. The neck does not contain the choke. The poet does not contain the poem. The sky does not contain the watcher.

—By Minister Marvin K. White

Containment Zone: A complex conjunction of high crime and civic neglect common to low-income urban areas around the world. Borders of urban containment zones are enforced by a combination over-policing at the periphery and under-policing within, with hostile design of public space enforcing these borders.
The Tenderloin is often referred to as a Containment Zone by neighborhood activists calling out decades-long institutionalized civic neglect. Skywatchers, a Tenderloin-based performing arts ensemble, upends the concept of containment, exploring instead what is rich, profound, and transformative that the neighborhood and its residents also contain: radical acceptance, resilience, creativity, and fierce compassion. With this work we call for the celebration and expansion of these superpowers which hold the seeds of our collective and shared liberation.

ABD/Skywatchers’ upcoming work, From Containment to Expansion, moves with the community artists of the Tenderloin from relegation to determination. The stories push back against popular notions the Tenderloin is where you end up. But for the resident/artists, the Tenderloin is not where you are put on punishment. The Tenderloin is not Karma. The Tenderloin is not paper towels on a spill. The stories that Containment to Expansion dares to utter are about volition.

Poor folks, black folk, women folk, queer folk, drunk folk, drug folk, most folk have to choose to be here. The actors and performers and musicians, through word and rhythm making, say that they are not fighting to hold on, that they are fighting to break free; Free from the invitation to become crises actors in the exploitation film. They are fighting against type and willfully choosing not to be cast as “Crab in The Barrel No 1, Turf Warlord, Rose in Concrete, Broken Bottle No. 3, Abandoned Baby Stroller, Building Piss, or Stop and Frisk.”

The Tenderloin does not mean what you think it means. Does not mean invisible. Does not mean small. Does not mean nothing. The Tenderloin is not “marked” as in “targeted” but “marked” as in “glyphed.” The truth shared in From Containment to Expansion, is the Tenderloin Codex and everything gon’ make sense when they decipher the Tenderloin. Everything gon’ be clear when they know its coal that’s singing, not the canary. They gon’ know, the bird don’t speak for us, if the bird sing a song about us being dangerous. It’s deep, but it’s not complex.

From Containment to Expansion will draw on histories of resistance, from the liberatory movements of the Gullah people of South Carolina’s lowlands to Martin Luther King Jr’s Poor People’s campaign of 1968, up to and including the BLM and current iteration of the Poor People’s Campaign. The performance, though based deeply in movement, will employ spoken word, drumming, stick pounding, and song, including a commissioned sound score by internationally recognized singer, choral director, and vocal activist Melanie DeMore, whose artistic and musical history is deeply embedded in the liberatory power of collective song. Working in close collaboration with Skywatchers’ 20 member ensemble, DeMore blends African roots and rhythms, stick pounding, and African American spirituals to create improvisational and participatory choral arrangements.

We talk to God in the Tenderloin. I know God talking about me cuz my ears burning. I know I’m somebody’s prayer. Different from being prayed for. Godliness is a choice I make every time I enter a door or a dream. A conversation not an order. God don’t got no more than ten commandments anyway. Ain’t no glass ceiling between us and God. Ain’t no heaven between here and God. Ain’t nobody standing in the way of my promotion. I walk to work every day. You’d know that if you decided that living was your job. Your breath smell like Goddrunk. God the designated driver. God get you home safe. God make you laugh like they do in the movies. That’s what that feeling of silliness, of lucidity, of divinity is. That’s what this story is. Difference is, this morning don’t need to spill Mary’s blood. Your radio set to wake you up to the miracle station. This show, inventory your space. Rent God a room. Let God reside in you. Offer this, your body as the one to view this human condition through. We are an expansion of God’s territory. God don’t end in the Tenderloin. Forever don’t skip over the Tenderloin. If you hear me singing, “Increase My Territory,” I ain’t asking for more, I’m asking less. That’s the lesson. I’m in the thought of God. Thought of God. Make sense? So unselfish. So much honor. I’m in service. I’m stronger in this wake when I laid down sleep. I’m go do what is expected of me. You heard right. I’m expected. And anything expected cannot be contained.

FROM CONTAINMENT TO EXPANSION
Outdoor Performances Friday through Sunday, May 14-16, 2021
5:30pm performances in the Tenderloin May 14 & 15
2:00pm matinee in the Mission District on May 16
For information about location and times: abdproductions.org

MARVIN K. WHITE, MDIV, is currently serving as the Full-time Minister of Celebration at GLIDE Church in San Francisco. He is a graduate of The Pacific School of Religion, where he earned a MDiv. He is the author of four collections of poetry: Our Home Be Witness, Status: and the two Lammy-nominated collections lost rights and nothin’ ugly fly. He was named one of YBCA’s “10” in 2019. He is articulating a vision of social, prophetic and creative justice through his work as a poet, artist, teacher, collaborator, preacher, cake baker, and Facebook Statistician.
FINDING A FLOW THROUGH HEARTISTRY

By FARAH YASMEEN SHAIKH

Oh my, not another podcast.

With an infinite number of podcasts to listen to, why would I add another one to the list? Would anyone even listen to it, who would I speak with, what would we discuss? Pondering what would interest and motivate me had to be balanced with what would draw in guests and listeners alike. Before I get into this heart-filled idea that in so many ways created itself, I’ll first share the behind the scenes of how it all came to be.

Ironically, much like the projects and productions that start out as a glimmer of an idea, this too was that. Before the podcast could truly materialize, I had to consider all of those questions above, and I had to be clear with myself about my bandwidth and my intentions.

WHAT & WHY?

In the mix of the artist life hustle, I find myself going nonstop. I rarely take the time to engage with others to get a sense of what is working for them, hear of their challenges and successes, share my own, and go through what would be a collaborative reflective process. Like many artists, I go from project to project, production to production, teaching one class to the next, grant to grant, practicing, choreographing… you get it. I might attend an information session, or even a networking event, but hardly ever take the time to just talk to someone without it being tied to a particular outcome.

Lightbulb moment. The idea was born.

Initially, I thought I would create a podcast based on the “business of being an artist.” This would be a great way to engage, with the hope that they would listen to each other’s episodes, and we could collectively learn from and support one another in hearing each person’s experiences. But wait… As much as it excited me to create a platform for engaging artists from across the globe, the divide between artists and non-artists was also weighing on me. Perhaps this podcast could contribute to bridging the gap between non-artists and artists and the assumptions that we lead totally different lives. It could be a space where we can acknowledge that the pursuit of one’s passions can be equally inspiring and informative, regardless of what “industry” you are a part of. I also wanted to shine a light (in that blue light kind of way to expose the things that we often don’t want to see) on the fact that artists work tirelessly with often minimal financial remuneration, and are highly undervalued, especially in comparison to those in areas such as tech, medicine, law, and, dare I say it, “more traditional” careers.

These various thoughts and ideas began to coalesce, and in February of 2020, the Heartistry Talk Show was born.

Heartistry is a podcast based on the idea that we are all artists—creating choreography or masterpiece through our respective life paths—and the belief that when life is approached with heart, there is a form of artistry, or as we call it “heartistry.”

Through my journey of performing, teaching and collaborating, I have had the opportunity to meet many incredible visionaries that inspire me. I had a deep desire to get to know them better, and I also wanted to find a way for others to be equally inspired by what they had to share.

Now 50 episodes in, I have had the immense pleasure of welcoming guests from around the globe—each bringing a passion, compassion and commitment to what they are doing, income generating or not. Conversations take place with dancers and artists of various genres, educators, entrepreneurs, activists, government officials, lawyers, and more—uncovering the layers of how we each find an artistic flow with our heart leading the way.

The podcast initially airs on Rukus Avenue Radio—an online radio station as part of the DASH Radio platform, with Rukus Avenue Radio being their “South Asian Radio Station.” Though not exclusively, many of the guests on Heartistry are from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan); however, this too has been an unexpected outcome: to communicate the diversity of South Asians who are often stereotyped as having particular career paths and lifestyles.
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Following the air date, each episode can be found on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

Season 1 welcomed phenomenal individuals including many who make up the rich tapestry of Bay Area artists—Kai Davis, René Marie Gudry, Raissa Simpson, David Herrera, Deena Warrir, Jim Sanj Owen, Kawika Ailāhe, Shilpa Raaj & Changere Singh, Amit Patel and Wayne Hazard along with many others—each sharing their amazing story of finding and following their heart led passion. Listen to any and all of the episodes.

As 2020 went on, probably needless to say, all of our guests joined me via Zoom rather than in person. Consider all that has been going on in the world, my time in conversation with each guest continued to yield stories of their respective journeys, as well as the conveyance of a deeply reflective state of mind. Through a virtual, visual platform, we are utilizting their art as a catalyst for change, using their artistic mediums to promote the message or cause they are calling attention to. We see it in music, in film, and our favoritie—dance.

In these episodes of the Heartistry Video Series, we are bringing together a powerful group of women-of-color artists from across the US. We honor and celebrate the work that they do to advocate for equality and justice, addressing issues through their artistic voice and movement. Taking a deeper look at how they engage in conversations, dance making and activism through performances, teaching and choreographing — often spotlighting various systems of oppression such as racism, casteism, colorism, gender inequality, classism, religious divide and so much more - we will speak with each artist to understand and learn from their approach, their process and the outcomes.

Our collaborating artists include: Brinda Guha, Athena Nair, Alicia Nascimento, Annette Phillips, Nadhi Thakkell and Aysha Upchurch.

In the second of these two episodes, we will premiere a new collaborative work, including Farah, where the artists will come together to create a new dance work and will also welcome special guest Valarie Kaur, a seasoned civil rights activist, award-winning filmmaker, lawyer, faith leader, and author of See No Strangers—A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love.

Each of these women is mind-blowing and heart-healing, and I can’t wait to share the conversations and the new work that comes out of this timely and powerful coming-together of creativity, collaboration and community.

As we continue on this quest to find our flow (including the ebbs), I invite you to learn more about Heartistry, to not hesitate to contact me if you, or someone you know, would be interested in being a guest on the podcast or perhaps a future episode of the Heartistry Video Series.

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FARAH YASMEEN SHAIKH is an internationally acclaimed performer, choreographer and instructor, and Founder & Artistic Director of Noorani Dance. As a performer, Farah is known for her evocative storytelling, technical precision, delicacy and grace, with two decades of training from the late Pandit Chitresh Das. Farah has developed a unique artistic voice, often addressing topics of historical and social relevance, while also maintaining the classical elements of kathak. Farah performs her own traditional and innovative works, most notably, The Forgotten Kathak. Farah is a seasoned civil rights activist, award-winning filmmaker, lawyer, faith leader, and author of See No Strangers— A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love.
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