



SUMMER 2021

indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.30 The Reclaiming



P.22 A New Light



P.40 stylish muscling

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WELCOME

By Sima Belmar, Guest Editor

I WROTE MY FIRST DANCE REVIEW for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* in the late 90s. I had been writing listings for a while and this was my big break—500 words on the Bay Area debut of Sonya Delwaide’s Compagnie de Danse L’Astragale at Laney College in Oakland. When I received the first edits from, J.H. “Tommy” Tompkins, I thought, “Oh well. I guess I can’t be a writer.” It looked like he had pressed “select all” and then “strikethrough.” And his marginalia! Scribble after scribble of disdain. Tommy had shredded the review and, along with it, my soul. But when I went into his office to hand in my badge, Tommy explained that his edits and comments, though harsh, were a sign that he was taking my writing seriously and an act of encouragement. So I took his edits and comments to heart, revised the review, and went on to write for the Guardian for several years. I wasn’t sure that Tommy’s “tough love” editorial style was necessary to encourage green writers like myself, and though I remain grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to develop my craft, I’ve been lucky to have had a range of readers among peers in graduate school, friends in the dance community, and right here at *In Dance*, who’ve helped me form my editorial praxis, one that encourages extensive dialogue between writer and editor. I assume that if I don’t understand what I’m reading, the problem may not be with the writing; how I hear the written word is an amalgam of my literary experiences as an over-educated Gen X Ashkenazi Jewess from Brooklyn.

The original call for writers for this issue of *In Dance* emphasized my interest in hearing from dancer-millennials who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBT+ and/or disabled, and in folks who may not have experience with writing. I wanted to work with writers as a developmental editor, to move back and forth through Google Docs until each felt their articles struck the right balance between individual voice and clarity of message (or fuck clarity of message, as the case may be). I reached out to folks I knew who reached out to folks they knew, a community effort that led to over 20 dancers who’ve expressed interest in writing. The essays by JP Bayani, Lashon Daley, ArVejon Jones, Joslynn Mathis Reed, Ezra Myles, Benedict Nguyen, Nkeiruka Oruche, and Preethi Ramaprasad are the fruit of a truly dialogic process. They express the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of a generation of artists living the double whammy of choosing a dance life in the context of late capitalism and enduring systemic racism, sexism, and trans/homophobia. Dancers are connoisseurs of what a body can do and what a body knows, and I’m extraordinarily privileged to have several platforms at my disposal to uplift their voices—on the podcast Dance Cast, in my classes at UC Berkeley, and right here at *In Dance*.

I’m certain their stories will move you to laughter, tears, and action.



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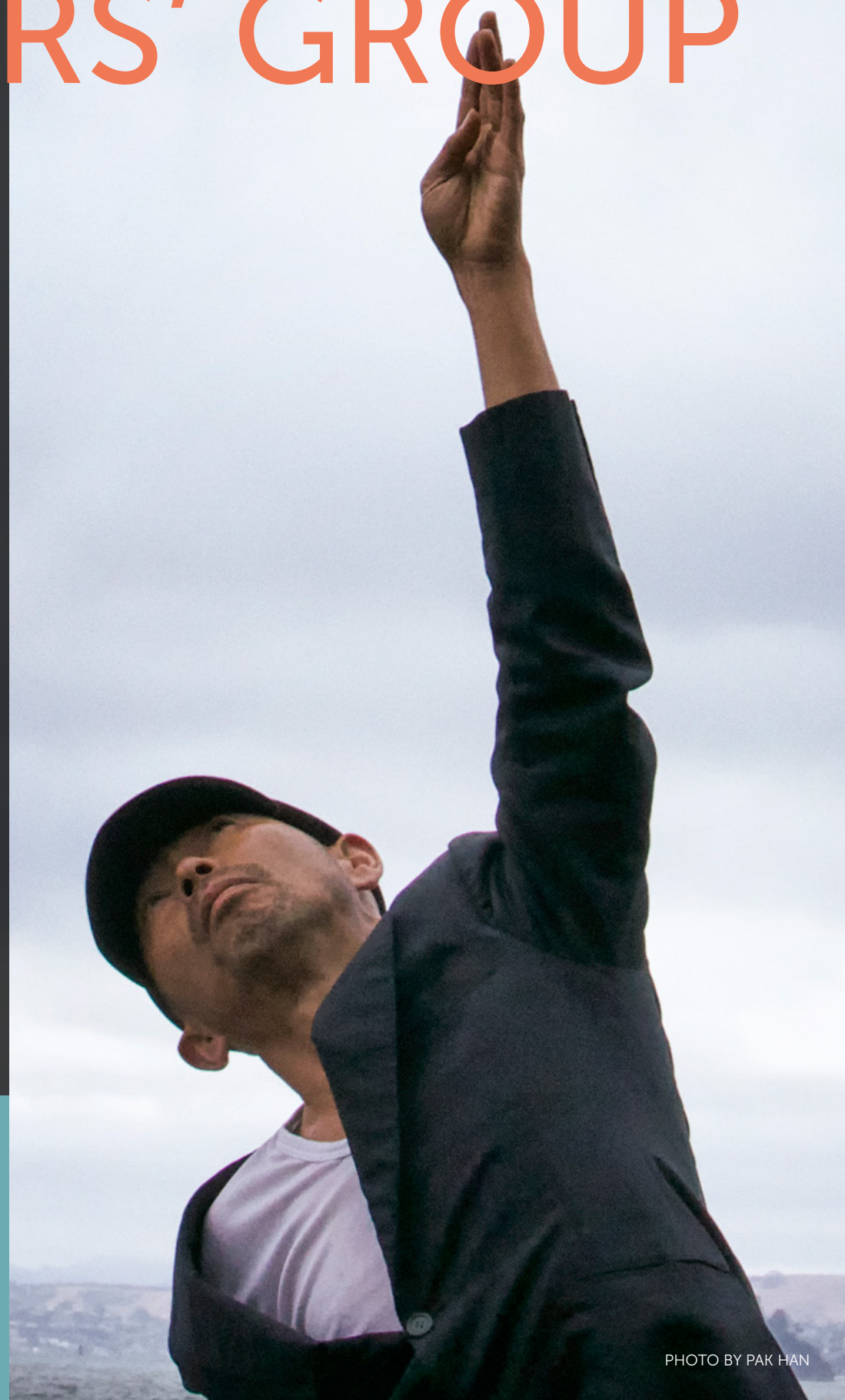


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by NKEIRUKA ORUCHE

CASTING

Internationally-Flexing, Izzie-Award-winning, Artistic Director of Afro Urban Society, Nkeiruka Oruche, a 15-year+ IRL & URL vibes dispenser and charlatan of Afro Urban Dance is casting for a new show that takes place at the renowned Ase-Umoja-Juju Cultural Dance Center.

This docu-series, tentatively titled DO YOU EVEN KNOW HOW TO DANCE?, follows participants as they navigate the riveting world of African dance class, from Congolese to Senegalese, Afro-Brazilian to Cuban, Haitian to Hip Hop, and more. We are looking for movers of all types and levels, including but not limited to: folks who can launch into unsolicited full splits and back-bends, the ability to dance on the 1, non-stop chatterboxes, people that always do that one ‘African’ dance move, social media slayers, and more. Talent must be comfortable acting out improvisational scenes and demonstrating extreme emotion on camera (e.g. unwavering focus, I-don’t-care attitude, just-give-me-da-light eyes, am I disgusted or is it “I just can’t see the instructor” frustration).

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTIST



CALL

FOR NEW “AFRICAN”
DANCE REALITY SHOW

ROLES



TEACHERING TEACHER

Maybe you're the homegrown 5th-generation master dancer who just came from the motherland yesterday, or you spent 15 years studying under so and so, or you realized that hmm this African dance thing, I can do it as a profession. Either way. We don't understand what you're saying, and we can't keep up. But we love it here. Do you have any of those lapas for sale?

COUNTING COURTNEY

Is the dip on the 5,6 or the 6,7? How many times do you twist your middle left toe, before you do the turn? But can you please count it? You keep saying Trakata trakata boom, and I don't know if it is 1, 2, 3 4 5. Sis, this is African dance, if I say, Umm aH, boom boom, traga traga ah eh tikititi tukuttu tikititi tukutu, oooh oooh Ah-baka baka bak! Cos if it's- then it's-, LEAN, then it's ra ra POP. Then that's what it is. Adapt.

SERIOUS SAMMY

They never smile, or do extra galavanting with anyone. Their eyes and attention are always on you. The whole time. Unless you say otherwise, of course. Following every move. Revising and paying attention to their body. You wonder if you should have brought scantron sheets for the test.

AUTHENTIC ABENA

They are actually from the culture, or they are an elder in the practice. You show a move or combination and when they do it and it's like *sun glints off an untouched river in the Serengeti *. They not even trying to show out, they just got it. Easy. A gazelle flitting through the savanna. You question your validity.

LOYAL LOLA

They will come. Every week. Every class. Even if you travel to Mars to do class, you will see them there. They will pay their money. Not a dollar more or less. They will say, see you next week, and you will, in fact, see them next week.

COMFORTABLE COMFORT

They walk in, holding their water bottle. Smiling at the wall, the floor, the ceiling, everyone. They wave. Today na today.

You will always find these ones in the center of the room. Nothing is going to ruin their moment.

BACKHOME BINTOU

They come in and they are giving it what it's supposed to give! You are getting life. You're giving them, they are taking it. They are giving you! You are receiving it! But beware! Some of them are habitual contrarians. They. Will. Never. Follow. Instructions. They won't follow your moves. They'll do their own thing because they already know how it's sposed to go. They are irritating af but you can't say shit, because, well, you're grateful they are here. What's that tiny bead of sweat just on the corner top of your left eyebrow? My friend, call it what it is: Molecule of Apprehension. Because with all the glee of having your fam in the building, you know, you BETTA not fuck around and do or say a move incorrectly. The eye roll and sucking teeth that will follow, enh? You will cry for your mother.

SEARCHING FOR THE MEANING-THIRD EYE LUNALIGHTLOVE GRASS

Africa! Oh Ancient "undiscovered" Africa. Enshrined in a glass case of pure antiquity. These ones have come to find you, your dance, your music, your ways. What does this back pop move mean? Does it open my 5th chakra? It reminds me of a move I did at this silent yoga retreat I went to last week. Can you speak more to the energy and depth of this whole experience? Allison, it's really just 'shake. your. ass'.

ROOTFUL RUWA

This is their first time coming to take an African dance class. Even though you've been asking them for over 7 years to come. But now they have watched Black Panther. They must discover their roots. Incase Wakanda citizenship application comes. Well done sah. Well done ma. Whenever a person wakes up, is their morning. Here's your dashiki.

THRIFTY TAMMY

Aunty! Do you want me to live in poverty? Do you know how many hours it takes to be learning dance, practicing routines, curating music, packing all my shit, putting a smile on my face and energy in my voice, while my life is in shambles to be here for you? I don't have health insurance. If my leg breaks today you will say 'sending healing vibes'. You want all the joy and life I have to give, but you want to complain about money? Listen, man cannot live by vibes and inshallah alone. Why is it so costly? Have you asked your Gucci bag the same question? God is watching you. Send Money.

SHOW OFF SALEM

Ok. You need some kind of attention that you not getting elsewhere. Or maybe you just a Leo and you always just do that anyway. Breh, this is not an audition or performance. Calm down small abeg. Oh! ohhhh? I see. You ALSO teach your own class, and you came here for the sole purpose of everyone noticing you so that folks will come and talk to you, and you will give them a promo flyer. Ah ah. I see what you did there. We bow. Tactics.

TRIFLING TRIBALIST

They are from another African ethnic group, and they are there solely to express their superiority over you. These are the mumus that never miss a Ghana vs. Naija jollof battle. But you're Senegal. Flex your superiority. Ignore them. E choke.

EVER-KNOWING EVELYN

In 1983, I traveled to Makoko village. Have you been? No, Evelyn, I'm sorry that colonization has made it so I never was able to visit any other African regions, and now have been forced to arrive in the U.S. and the way the immigration system is set up? I can't ever really go back, or go anywhere else. Oh that's nice, you've been to my family village as well? Oh lovely, tell me more. Do I know Chief Manguru? No. No. I don't. Oh you created a charity for him. Lovely. Yes. Yes. I'm just a basic dance teacher. I know nothing. I've been nowhere. Oh I see I'm not 'that' interesting after all. Thanks for not coming to my class anymore. Tell my villagers I said hi.

PRIVATE-LESSON POOJA

I'm really struggling getting it, and I just can't really deal with other people distracting me in the space. Can I set some time for privates with you? Ah, Pooja. This is a social dance, part of learning is being with other people. If strangers don't sweat or breathe on you, the dance will not work. Just keep coming. Omg are you pouting? What is this behavior?

MASTERFUL MACKENZIE

Do you know it takes me an average of 2 years to learn each movement? And I'm still learning and refining. But you paid \$15 and you are angry because you didn't 'master' it in 30 minutes. Am I a microwave?

FITFAM MAYA

They come in jogging. They have overpriced non-wicking tight pants on, a headband, a fresh tee from their gym program, step-tracker watch, and a protein shake in a high-lighter colored bottle. Whenever you pause to give instructions or move the formation of the class, they start jogging

on the spot. When you call for a water break, you find them in the corner doing jumping jacks and burpees. They think your warm up is weak af.

'MY SPOT' SHARIF

Front row warriors. They protec', they attac' but most importantly they come back. If you tell the front line to move to the back, they will wrinkle their nose and look up to the ceiling to avoid eye contact. Every time you change up the rows, their ears will close and they still end up in front. Unaware victims (see: Comfortable Comfort), who find themselves taking their spot, will mysteriously receive a, Oh, my bad, did I bump you?

BACKWALL BETTY

These ones will never come out of the woodworks. Their eyes are unrelentlessly wide and bulging. The ones who will have a heart attack if you look at them, or tell them to do a demo or solo. Oh god. They have died now.

WATCHFUL HUANG

Oh you're just here to 'watch'. Well, since you've decided that we are African Netflix, as of next week I'm going to start charging a subscription fee.

MANAGING MANAGER

Oh what y'all doing in here? Is this some kind of African Hipity hop? Oh you know I used to do a lil' African dance back in my day. Learned a few moves. Oh nah. It's okay. I'm good, I just wanted to see what all the noise was about. Oh and by the way, y'all ten minutes over time, I need to close the building, if y'all don't leave in the next 5 minutes, I'll be forced to write you up. Ha! Uncle, how did we come to the end of the road so fast?

MIRAGE MIRIAM

Mama so and so, it was great to see you. You really were amazing, I don't know if that's your real name, and I don't have your contact info. If you see this message, I still have the wrapper and left over food container that you kept in the corner even tho I mentioned no eating in class. Also, have you seen my phone charger? It was next to your bag.

NKEIRUKA ORUCHE is a multi-local, multi-interested Igbo creative who currently works and plays in Huchiun, uncaded Lisjan Ohlone territory. Written words have always been her jam. You may find her cuddled up in bed battling debilitating pain, while simultaneously planning themed house parties or making spread-sheets to organize the multi-pronged takedown of capitalistcolonialheteropatriarchy. She's obsessed with Pan Afro-Urban culture and believes that most of our problems can be cured with a fire-ass playlist.

Absorb her reverberations through [Afro Urban Society](#), [Bakanal de Afrique](#), [BoomShake Music](#), and [House/full of BlackWomen](#). If personal stalking is more your vibe, try your luck at [nkeioruche.com](#), IG: [@nkorigible](#); TW: [@Playcookie](#) or just Send money Paypal / Venmo / Zelle. Because, Igbo girls don't swim in water, we swim in wealth.

CYPHERS IN CYBERSPACE

REIMAGINING CULTURAL ARTS AND DANCE EDUCATION IN A POST-COVID WORLD

by EZRA MYLES

ON TUESDAY, MARCH 16TH, 2020, Governor Newsom announced that a shelter-in-place order would go into effect across the State of California. Initially, I went into quarantine secretly optimistic. Running from late-night performance gigs to school sites to weekend events was already taking its toll on my health, so I saw the SIP as an opportunity to take much-needed (and deserved) time to rest, reflect, and plan. Before the start of the pandemic, I worked in Richmond as a cultural arts educator, event production manager, and program administrator for East Bay Center for the Performing Arts. I coordinated after-school enrichment programs and taught Afro-Diasporic dances like Samba and Hip-Hop to African-American youth in the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

PHOTO BY DONALD HAFENDEN, UPROUND PHOTOS



CARNIVAL PARADES ARE INTENSIVE, ORCHESTRATED PRODUCTIONS, but they are also very much about the spontaneity of dancing and playing music in the streets for the pure joy of performance.

Before the pandemic, I knew that many of my students weren't aware of the Afro-Diasporic roots of the art forms we studied, but I only provided historical context to supplement a focus on technique and physical fitness. I didn't feel the urgency to explore these aspects in-depth because when we were together in person they could experience firsthand the qualities of Afro-Diasporic dances that make them so powerful and special. Whether it was the Hip-Hop cyphers of the Bronx, the capoeira and samba rodas of Brazil, or the Second Line parades of New Orleans, these practices inherently cultivated rituals of community exploration, competition, cooperation, and social/emotional awareness through self-expression. During virtual learning, I realized how important it is to explicitly articulate our dance practices' shared histories and legacies through play. For my students to see the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual benefits of learning culturally responsive arts education, I had to forsake linear, regimented, Westernized pedagogical structures in favor of a circular, holistic, experience that more accurately reflected the Afro-diasporic communities from which these art forms originated.

Over 365 days later, the country is slowly emerging from its solitary confinement. As I reflect on this year of virtual dance learning, one thing has become strikingly

clear: not only are many of our young students tragically estranged from their cultural and artistic heritage, but this estrangement negatively affects their social, emotional, and intellectual development. More than any other performing art form, Afro-diasporic dances come from traditions built within the safety and power of the drum circle, the roda, the cypher. These dance rituals thrive in spaces of physical contact and connection between performers, musicians, and the audience. Without those spaces, students are left with nowhere to go but social media and video games for connection.

The problem is that these cyberspaces are often unprotected social spaces where concepts of dance as an art form are oversaturated with decontextualized viral dances like Fortnite "emotes" and any number of dance challenges on TikTok. Emotes, short, downloadable interactions like taunts, poses, and dances, are based on real dances taken from popular trends and Afro-Diasporic culture and renamed without attribution or context. Notable diasporic dance additions to Fortnite include the "Conga" of Afro-Cuban origin; the comedic, Carlton Banks-inspired "Fresh" dance; and "Breakneck," an acrobatic move originally known in Hip-Hop circles as the "Windmill." Out of the 45 students that I taught this year between ages 8-15, 75% of them actively use TikTok and 50% of them play Fortnite. Out of those same 45 students, only 5 of them knew anything about

the Transatlantic Slave Trade or the Afro-Diasporic origins of Hip-Hop dance before taking my class.

Second, the lack of comprehensive, culturally responsive arts education in our public schools deprives the students of valuable context to understand and navigate their experiences as children of color in America. In other words, the dances they see on TikTok and other social media platforms are part of a history that they are not aware of and our public schools are not filling the gaps. Without that crucial context, under-resourced teaching artists are left with the herculean task of teaching the content in a way that is engaging enough to bridge the knowledge gap while also providing social, emotional, and/or physical wellness. And this was before introducing the myriad technological barriers that arose during virtual learning.

In the absence of that reciprocal relationship, the pandemic forced me to adapt in order to recreate that space of connection at the intersection of dance practice, art history, and technology. One way that I did this was through teaching about Carnival. Carnival's vibrant, multicultural festival of food, music, dance, and pageantry is coded with both joyful liberation and subversive resistance. It inherited the subversiveness from its European roots as a Pre-Lenten festival of excess but gained new meaning as an emancipation tradition through the African, Asian, and Indigenous practices that were infused into the parades, performances, and parties. It is also one of

the few cultural heritage celebrations that is recognized in some fashion across every part of the African Diaspora. While the depth and breadth of these experiences transcend dance, by focusing on performance through play and the emotional release that we experience in dance, I was able to help students alleviate the emotional toll of the pandemic.

Carnival parades are intensive, orchestrated productions, but they are also very much about the spontaneity of dancing and playing music in the streets for the pure joy of performance. During class, I taught the Trinidadian concept of "playin' mas," short for masquerade, to introduce the concept of performance as play. I then recreated that experience in the virtual classroom through games. The first game was Kahoot, an online learning platform where educators can create

to focus on learning the techniques, but to have fun, become familiar with the music, and let go of the pressure to be perfect.

By changing the format of my Carnival dance curriculum to focus on play, I was able to move away from technique toward expression. In doing so, my students were able to at least acknowledge their emotional well-being, if not process and articulate how they felt in a healthy way. This is critical because whether it's our professional workplaces, our students' classrooms, or our intimate, interpersonal relationships, we are constantly told to check our emotions like luggage at the proverbial door of success. During the pandemic, this was no longer sustainable. Some of my students would sit in the same room for six hours, stressing about internet issues, their parents' job security, their grandparents' health and safety, while trying to learn Math

programming is still concerning, and many of my students will continue to engage in social media and video games as their primary forms of peer-to-peer interaction. However, I'm grateful to know that my students will return to in-person instruction excited about dance, armed with a foundational knowledge of their heritage, greater self-worth, and better tools for self-advocacy and self-expression. I am inspired by my students' resilience and growth despite the tragic circumstances and I am invigorated by how creativity allowed us to adapt and adopt new means of building connections through dance. Most of all, I am humbled to witness how the traditions of Afro-Diasporic cultural arts still carry truth and power through practice, even across the Internet. As a millennial dancer, artist, and educator, I believe it is my

MORE THAN ANY OTHER PERFORMING ART FORM, Afro-diasporic dances come from traditions built within the safety and power of the drum circle, the roda, the cypher.

their own trivia games for students to practice and learn. This allowed me to introduce names, figures, places, and events without the students feeling like they're being tested and pressured. The second game was "follow the leader," a dance activity where I showcase a series of movements in sequence and ask the students to follow along to the best of their ability. These movements focus on both technique and process. I incorporate body isolations and footwork in quick succession to a wide range of Carnival music including New Orleans Second-Line, Trinidadian Soca, and Brazilian Samba. The purpose is not for the students

or English. By the time they came to dance, not only were they tired of Zoom, but there was no outlet for their stress. By taking intentional time to express our feelings at the beginning and end of every class, dancing spontaneously, and removing the pressure to perform, they managed to learn both about the culture and the beauty of connecting through that culture despite being physically separated.

As we cautiously return to in-person education, events, and experiences, I am sobered by the immense burden that the pandemic placed on our students, our systems, and our community. The uncertainty around the future of education and arts

privilege and responsibility to carry forward that knowledge into the 21st century in a way that bridges the gap between the drum circle and the cybersphere.

EZRA MYLES is a Choreographer, Illustrator, Poet, Event Producer, and Arts Educator with over a decade of experience performing across the country and internationally. He is currently utilizing his skills as a creative to support local arts organizations in the Bay Area focused on empowering youth and providing community wellness through the arts. He is a Production and Programs Coordinator at East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, one of the principal dancers and Co-producers for SambaFunk! Carnaval Explosion, and founder of MylesBeyond Entertainment, a production company that provides event, entertainment, and marketing services.



BLACK BALLERINAS in Picture Books

Rupturing the Color Line in American Children's Literature

BY LASHON DALEY, PHD

OVER THE PAST FIFTY YEARS as a result of the call for diverse children's books, there has been a steady trickling in of publications featuring protagonists of color. As a Black girlhood studies scholar, I pay close attention to picture books that portray Black girls. More specifically, I intersect dance studies and children's literary studies in order to explore the representation of Black ballerinas in autobiographical and biographical children's picture books. In doing so, I demonstrate how these texts help to define what it means to be young, Black, and female in ballet as this social identity becomes characterized within African American children's literature.

In my larger body of work, I explore books published before the start of 2020, which include Debbie Allen's *Dancing in the Wings* (2000), Misty Copeland's *Firebird: Ballerina Misty Copeland Shows a Young Girl How to Dance Like the Firebird* (2014), Kristy Dempsey's *A Dance Like Starlight: One Ballerina's Dream* (2014), Michaela DePrince's *Ballerina Dreams: A True Story* (2017), and Michelle Meadow's *Brave Ballerina: The Story of Janet Collins* (2019). In this article, I focus on Copeland's *Firebird* because of its notable influence within the industry.

Winner of the 2015 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award and the 2015 Ezra Jack Keats Book Award New Writer Honor, Copeland's *Firebird* tells the story of a young dancer who desires Copeland's balletic success. However, the protagonist does not have confidence in her abilities as a ballet dancer. She believes that there is a space between her aptitudes and that of Copeland's that is "longer than forever" (Copeland 2014, 1). At first read, the narrative seems to allude to a young Copeland speaking to her adult self, desiring to know the outcome of her current labor. Will she fulfil her dream and become a prima ballerina?

Illustrated by Christopher Myers, the first image of *Firebird* features the protagonist dressed in bright-yellow fitted clothing performing an arabesque. Upstage of the protagonist is an enlarged image of Copeland also in arabesque. Copeland is dressed in her fiery-red firebird costume—perhaps a foreshadowing of who the girl will someday be. In the next scene, the protagonist stares into her mind's eye, imagining Copeland in a white costume with an accompanying tiara. The scene depicts a leaping Copeland soaring over the East River against the New York City skyline at night. Here,

Copeland places her downstage arm on the girl's downstage shoulder. Copeland then encourages the protagonist to "let the sun shine on your face" before proceeding to tell of her story of becoming a prima ballerina (Copeland 2014, 7).

As a Black ballerina in a White ballet world, Copeland's life narrative is also one saturated with exclusion, isolation, and marginalization. In her memoir, *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*, Copeland narrates how she not only navigated poverty and hunger in her childhood, but moreover, continuously navigated her black-

I demonstrate how these texts help to define what it means to be young, Black, and female in ballet as this social identity becomes characterized within African American children's literature.

the protagonist likens Copeland to the "sky and clouds and air" with feet that are as "swift as sunlight" (Copeland 2014, 3). It is Copeland's elongated leap that the protagonist imagines stretching "across the skyline like the daylong sun over the horizon" (Copeland 2014, 3). By the following page, the protagonist's visualization has ended, and she returns back to reality, where she is alone and downcast. She is seated on the floor staring at the ground with her knees pulled to her chest. She believes herself to be as "gray as rain/heavy as naptime, low as a storm pressing on rooftops" (Copeland 2014, 4). It is because of these beliefs, the protagonist doubts that she could ever "hope to leap the space between"—that is the space between her and Copeland (Copeland 2014, 5).

On the following pages, the girl's hope is partially realized as she comes face-to-face with Copeland. Kneeling in order to make eye contact with the narrative's young protagonist,

ness in a classical ballet world that is impoverished of Black dancing bodies, and as a result, hungry to consume them. Like the young protagonist she encourages in *Firebird*, as a young dancer, Copeland also struggled to close the gap between who she was—a fatherless mixed-race Black girl without a stable home—and who she imagined herself to be—a principal ballerina performing the most prestigious classical ballet roles.

Dance Scholar Brenda Gottschild acknowledges that there was a paradigm shift in the twentieth century regarding the Black dancing body. She argues that while "the black dancer remains Other, the black body, through dance, sports, fashion, and everyday lifestyle, become the last word in white desirability" (7). She specifies that what was once seen as "coonish" about the Black body is now seen as "Cool" with a capital C (7). While Gottschild goes on to complicate how the Black dancing body can, in some aspects,

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTIST

possess whiteness when it is trained in “white-based ballet,” it is important to consider how Copeland’s *Firebird* enacts a kind of spillage that augments the versatility of the Black dancing body, while reifying its otherness (22). Interestingly enough, it is actually the protagonist of the text who continuously highlights her own lack despite Copeland’s grand Black female representation. Most likely spurred on by institutional racism within ballet, the

That marginalization encourages them to seek support and community with other dancers who share the same or similar experiences.

protagonist figuratively projects her body as one labeled as “coon,” while labelling Copeland’s body as “Cool.” Gottschild argues that it is not the Black dancing body that has changed, it is rather our perception of it that has changed. For the young protagonist whose dismay is a result of the space between herself and Copeland—that space between coon and Cool—she must first change her perception in order to begin closing the space.

Firebird seemingly ends with both Copeland and the protagonist dressed in that same white ballet costume from the text's earlier pages standing in sous-sus. Copeland gazes stage right, while the protagonist gazes stage left. However, it is not until upon seeing the back cover that the reader is made privy to how this story ultimately ends. On the back cover, the protagonist is centered, dressed in that same white costume she was dressed in at the end of the narrative. She is now an adult. No longer standing on demi-pointe like in her childhood balletic practice, but en pointe. Her leg is in a low arabesque with a deep cambré back. Although she is alone again, this time her aloneness does not feel like loneliness. Rather, it

feels like the space she once longed to close has finally been sealed.

Copeland's picture book creates a public record of her experience as a ballerina integrating ballet and, subsequently, diversifying the industry of children's literature. In 2014, the year *Firebird* was released, out of 3,500 children's books that were published that year, only sixty-nine were written and/or illustrated by an African or African American creator and 179

books were about Africans or African Americans. Copeland's *Firebird* intersected both of those categories (a Black author and a Black illustrator), and in addition, diversified the industry by not only featuring two African American female lead characters, but two African American ballerinas. *Firebird* exemplifies the growing desire to make Black dancing bodies more visible, more legible, and consequently more consumable.

It also exemplifies the experience and provides language for what it means to live out a Black ballerina habitus. Black performance studies scholar Harvey Young (2010) explains that the “theory of habitus—thought in terms of a black habitus—allows us to read the black body as socially constructed and continually constructing its own self. If we identify blackness as an idea projected across a body, the projection not only gets incorporated within the body but also influences the ways that it views other bodies (20). Young goes on to detail how “black habitus has been shaped by the legacy of black captivity and other manifestations of discrimination within society: racial profiling and employment discrimination, among others” (21).

Black ballerinas develop not just a Black habitus, but a Black ballerina habitus that is constructed by the ways their bodies are subdued as a result of the intense training, and in the way their blackness is subdued. Because of their race, Black ballerinas are inherently relegated to the margins of the industry. That marginalization encourages them to seek support and community with other dancers who share the same or similar experiences. Then, on the rare occasion that they are able to move from the margins to the center, they are marked and categorized within the historical lineage of their position and promoted (like a saint) to the high ranks of Black history. Their legacy is then used to replicate the same system for the next Black ballerina. *Firebird*, I argue, is a part of the economic investment of Black ballerinas into other Black ballerinas, which shapes their world view, and the world view for those of us who read about them in picture books.

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DR. LASHON DALEY is the assistant professor of Black Children's Literature at San Diego State University. This article is excerpted from her book project, *Black Girl Lit: The Coming of (R) age Performances in Contemporary U.S. Black Girlhood Narratives, 1989-2019*, which charts how children's literature, film, television, and social media has helped shape our cultural understanding of what it means to be young, Black, and female in the U.S. Lashon recently received her PhD in Performance Studies with a Designated Emphasis in New Media from UC Berkeley. She also holds an MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College and an MA in Folklore from UC Berkeley. Her children's book, *Mr. Okra Sells Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*, was released in February 2016. LashonDaley.com

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BY PREETHI RAMAPRASAD

AN OLD FRIEND IN A **NEW LIGHT**

REFLECTIONS ON COLLABORATION IN BHARATANATYAM

BHARATANATYAM, a form of dance originating in South India, has rapidly gained a global reputation. With roots in temple ritual and salons passed from generation to generation through the hereditary dance and music community of Tamil Nadu, in post-colonial India, the practice began to attract students and performers from various backgrounds around the world as a performing art. While Bharatanatyam practitioners continue to navigate this history of shifts in performative practice, the art has now gained a serious fan following. With intricate movements, elaborate costuming, and intense training, its spheres of influence have grown to include everything from solo dancers to scholars to global touring ensembles.

I've loved Bharatanatyam from the moment my tiny feet set foot in my teacher's studio in Chennai, India. It demands utmost focus from its students and performers, and as a barely seven-year-old girl visiting my grandparents, I was drawn to this commitment. In my early twenties, I was able to move to



PHOTO BY MANASI MAHESH

*Sitting across from each other at the famous **NICK’S TACOS**, my friends and I began to ask, **HOW CAN WE IMAGINE BHARATANATYAM** as having space for discussion and debate on **POLITICS, CLASS, CASTE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY?***

Chennai to pursue a career as a Bharatanatyam soloist, working intimately with many colleagues and choreographers, but focusing largely on my individual practice. Chennai seemed like the place to be, laden with historical remnants of Indian dance and music history. During the city’s famous “December Performance Season,” ensemble and solo artists of various genres come together in large performance auditoriums. But nothing enraptured me more than the Bharatanatyam soloists.

During solo concerts, dancers perform up to seven compositions with varied themes and almost no breaks, for as long as an hour and a half. Some works of choreography are physically dynamic with catchy rhythmic sequences, while others require dancers to be more solitary using *abhinaya*, an expressive technique similar to miming. I rehearsed several hours a day and, after so much physical and emotional exertion, some performances would leave me with splitting headaches. Still, I embraced the solo Bharatanatyam dance as a career trajectory, covering up all evidence of effort—panting, sweat, pain—like all the dancers I admired. I didn’t think about dancing as labor, instead visualizing myself moving in glittering costumes for a rapt audience, pounding my feet on shiny wooden stages.

Several years later, when I moved back to the United States to be with my partner, I maintained the goal of being a soloist, but didn’t understand how to be a Bharatanatyam dancer here. While it has a vast audience



PHOTO BY MANASI MAHESH

in the United States, Bharatanatyam transmission and performance in this country is somewhat different from India. While India has more *sabhas*, performance organizations that provide spaces for dancers to perform, the United States offers avenues for artists to self-produce shows through grants and fellowship programs. India has a niche population of concert attendees for Indian dance, but selling tickets in the United States varies based on the population of Indian arts students and connoisseurs.

When I arrived in San Francisco, the local Bharatanatyam community opened up a new world for me, shifting my practice and perspective in the process. Sitting across from each other at the famous Nick’s Tacos, my friends and I began to ask, how can we imagine Bharatanatyam as having space for discussion and debate on

Festival alongside Sri Thina and Shruti Abhishek. We called it *When Eyes Speak* in reference to the ways Indian dance engages the eyes to communicate narrative and emotional content. Our goal was to highlight the vastness of Indian choreography in its myriad forms, from Odissi to contemporary, for San Francisco audiences. Then, in May 2018, Shruti, Nadhi Thekkekk, and I created Varnam Salons, facilitated intimate gatherings for dancers to share their work-in-progress versions of challenging compositions in the Bharatanatyam repertoire. With these spaces, we aim to eradicate the barriers between audience and performer in Indian dance, barriers that are strictly maintained on formal proscenium stages. We prioritize panel discussions, where the events run into lobby-talk and excited happy hours

performance sessions online. I was worried about how the pandemic would shift the impact of live shows, but have been pleasantly surprised to see friends hanging onto Zoom calls until the very end. We have taken master classes, practiced technique, and watched online concerts together. As COVID-19 cases rose in India, we raised funds for organizations that we knew on the ground. I have shared new work online, bouncing ideas off colleagues on Whatsapp before turning to my infamous ring-light-tripod-and-smart-phone arrangement. This community has kept me sane for the past 14 months, and it has also grown. While there is a sufficient amount of care that I take with social media, I find comfort in my friends’ worlds, watching and sharing their work on my page, as we try to build our own critical dance worlds.

*Labor has always been intrinsic to **BHARATANATYAM PRACTICE**, but what makes these **COLLABORATIONS** meaningful is the acknowledgement of **LABOR BY WAY OF ARTIST, SCHOLARLY, and AUDIENCE. SUPPORT.***

politics, class, caste, gender, and sexuality? In critiquing one another during open rehearsals, we started to discuss the efforts, costs, and travel involved with Bharatanatyam and asked, how can we question these structures and support one another? Meaningful collaboration helped me to understand that Indian dance functions not just as performative practice but also as a form of labor. These questions have now imbued my creative process, encouraging me to reflect on what I want to be dancing about right now, and how my work can respond to our fraught political world.

In late 2017, inspired by the SF Black Choreographers Festival, and at the urging of Joe Landini, I curated the first Indian Choreography

filled with chatter. Most importantly, we acknowledge the daily labor of artists, with compensation and technical support. Instead of stealthily wiping the sweat off to preserve layers of make-up for the stage, the salons feature dancers flushed with energy after sharing a challenging section of choreography with our intimate audience. Labor has always been intrinsic to Bharatanatyam practice, but what makes these collaborations meaningful is the acknowledgement of labor by way of artist, scholarly, and audience support.

In the middle of the global pandemic, many events moved to online platforms. With precise “tech rehearsals,” my collaborators and I held meeting after meeting to set up

Collaboration has offered a subversive response to frustrating events ranging from COVID-19 to state-sanctioned violence. It has opened doors for me to see Bharatanatyam not from the perspective of individual career development, but rather the collective development of an artistic community. While I long to be on the stage again, I treasure these moments that have allowed me to see Bharatanatyam like an old friend in a new light for the very first time.

PREETHI RAMAPRASAD is a Bharatanatyam practitioner and a Ph.D. student in Critical Dance Studies at UC Riverside.

¹ I am greatly impacted by and draw on Priya Srinivasan’s text, *Sweating Sars: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (2011).

TRANSCENDING



IN THE DANCE WORLD

BY JOSLYNN MATHIS REED



Right after I completed my MFA in 2014, I landed my first dance professor job. I was hired to teach a Hip Hop class at a community college, and I was super excited for the opportunity to teach at the college level. I felt that this college would be a place where I could grow and collaborate with my colleagues. The students were driven and willing to put in the work of learning Hip Hop culture as well as movement, and I saw a future in which I could achieve my goals as a professor and mentor my students. During my first week on the job, a

colleague asked if I thought I had been hired because I was Black, or because of my skills and expertise. Reeling from how explicitly racist the question was, I didn't address it, and instead explained that my skill set included training and experience teaching multiple styles of dance as well as an MFA in Choreography and Performance.

After several years teaching Hip Hop dance at that college, I realized that expanding to teach other techniques was not in the cards. There were always different reasons—everything from not enough studio space to scheduling challenges. It became increasingly

clear that as the Black Hip Hop teacher, my opportunities would be limited. My presence there conveniently served to diversify the program, but only on superficial terms. Even though I was qualified and professionally trained to teach other styles of dance, my colleagues continually referred to me as “the Hip Hop teacher.” I love teaching Hip Hop, but I resent the assumption that it's the only dance form I can teach because I'm Black.

I have had to deal with racist micro-aggressions and attempts to put me in a box as a Black dance professor and choreographer my entire career. The cumulative effect of having students

PHOTO BY SHANNON STUBBLEFIELD



I'VE BEEN AFRAID OF BEING CALLED THE ANGRY BLACK WOMAN IF I ANSWER A QUESTION TOO DIRECTLY OR COME OFF TOO STRONG.

and colleagues question my authority and expertise (like the time a colleague asked if I had worked as hard as she had to get my master's degree) has compelled me to confront these stereotypes directly. Even though this experience is far from unique to me, it still hurts—every time.

I know a lot of Black people in the dance community don't say much about the racism and stereotyping they experience because they don't want to rock the boat, or because they're just tired of dealing with the relentless disrespect, regardless of the degrees they hold or how good of a job they're doing. I've been afraid of being called the angry Black woman if I answer a question too directly or come off too strong. When I was

younger and the only Black person in the room, I would never speak up because I already felt that I was in the spotlight.

In college, I began to speak up when confronted with racist comments because it was already clear to me that regardless of what we do as Black people, we continue to be disrespected. After having countless ballet teachers tell me to tuck in my behind because it was too big ("tuck tuck!"), I told one professor that this is my body type and my pelvis is exactly where it needs to be. (I also had to tell him to never touch me with his ballet stick to correct me again; I was sent home for the day for that one). When a director told me my locks were getting in the way of my

movement and distracting from the technique, I told him that my hair is part of my body and if it's a distraction maybe he should concentrate a little harder. I was surprised when he laughed and told me I was right, and that he had never thought of it as an extension of the movement.

But there have been times that, in the face of a particularly appalling remark, I couldn't find my voice. When I was pulled to the side by a director of a dance program, who asked me to confirm that I would not raise any racial discrimination issues against the institution because they had had "problems with black dancers in the past," and they hoped I was not *that kind of Black person*, I was left speechless and disempowered.

I wish I had said something in the moment, but I didn't because I respected my professors so much at the time, and because I was stuck in disbelief.

It might be hard for people of color to hear, but all racism and racist actions do not come exclusively from White people. I was once told by a Black instructor that I must have been trained by a White instructor to be as good as I am. People of color are also part of this broken system and, therefore, at risk of contributing to the systemic racism that has been integrated into the dance community—even if not on a conscious or intentional level. Ignorant and racist statements like that are heartbreaking to hear from someone who looks like you.

I am sharing these hurtful and racist experiences because it's time to put an end to the pretense that we have an inclusive environment in the dance community and in the larger arts community, not just in the Bay Area but everywhere. Merely hiring people of color does not create anti-racist spaces; we have to change the people who are calling the shots.

I am working hard to make the Bay Area dance community more inclusive and diverse. I'm excited to be joining the Board of Directors of the Shawl-Anderson Dance Center in Berkeley to lend my voice to reimagining a thriving community arts organization. I'm looking forward to creating more equitable and positive spaces for dancers and other artists.

I don't want the next generation of people of color to feel like they don't belong because they look different, even though they put in the work like any other dancer. Being proud of your blackness or heritage should not be a threat. We need to create an environment where people can be embraced for being individuals, rather than trying to put dancers of color into pre-designated, racist boxes.

It is important to point out that I have had many positive experiences in the dance community as a professor, dancer, and student. I have been fortunate to have great mentors and collaborators of all ethnicities, and in general the Bay Area is a great place to be an artist because of the diversity of cultures and experiences we have here. But the struggles with racism I have highlighted here are unfortunately endemic to my experience, as well as to the experiences of other BIPOC people.

The dance community (and the larger arts community) still has a long way to go. It is time to understand how White privilege is damaging and limiting *all of us*, and that we need to reimagine what it means to value and respect the contributions we are all working hard to make.

JOSLYNN MATHIS REED hails from Detroit Michigan. Her lifelong passion for dance has taken her on a journey that includes performing with Aretha Franklin as a teenager, studying West African dance in Ghana as an undergraduate, and teaching dance to a wide range of students over the years. In addition to leading workshops and intensives, she currently teaches ballet, modern, jazz, hip-hop, dance history, hip-hop culture, and advanced technique courses at several Bay Area colleges.

Joslynn founded Mathis Reed Dance Company in 2014, presenting work that explores the black experience in America through a multicultural, multiethnic lens. She has performed and collaborated with Shinichi Iova-Koga, Nina Haft, Wanjuru Kamuyu, Ana Marie and Sylvia Water (Alvin Ailey Company), Heather Stockton, Mills College Repertory Company, and California State University East Bay Repertory Company. Joslynn holds a B.A. in Dance/Theater Arts from California State University East Bay and an MFA in Dance Performance and Choreography from Mills College.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARTIST

THE RECLAIMING

by ArVejon Jones



PHOTOS BY MADELEINE ROSENTHAL

AS AN EDUCATOR who teaches young Black girls in East Oakland, a Lecturer at a local university, and an aging Black Queer artist, I consider it my responsibility to empower the next generation of dancers to understand their worth and advocate for themselves.

I am the squeaky wheel.

I have been dancing since I was 8 years old. Throughout my formal training in Tap, Jazz, Hip Hop, and Dunham Technique in Los Angeles, and Ballet, Modern, more Jazz, Afro-Haitian, Afro-Brazilian, Salsa, and Vogue in San Francisco, I was blessed to have studied with teachers and professors who encouraged me to reflect on my artistic choices, and who respected me as a person and not just as a dancer. As a dance major and Japanese minor in college, I learned to articulate myself inside and outside of the dance studio, through my body and my words.

But I was never formally taught how to advocate for myself—there’s no class for that. But what if I had been expected to point my feet, hold my core, *and* be able to speak up for myself? What if there had been language developed to approach difficult dance situations?

When I work with my size-diverse, 10-to-17-year-old students at Heat Danceline in Oakland, or with multicultural undergrads at SF State, I don’t talk about bodies as

a detriment—I highlight accomplishments. I’m known to give a rigorous and demanding class rooted in the belief that we are all capable of beautiful things. I understand the weight my words carry in my students’ lives outside of dance because I know how the words of my teachers continue to echo in my body today. Above all, I want my students to know they have the right to wield the power of No.

*The word ‘no’ carries an air of finality.
Many people are ill-prepared to hear it, and lack the
ability to accept it with poise and understanding.*

—DAMON ZAHARIADES

Before the pandemic, I was surely a “Yes” man, working myself to death and somehow pulling it all off. Waking up at 7:55am to get into the city for morning rehearsal at 9, or to class at 10 or 11:30, to then rush over to my gym

to teach my Cardio dance class, getting a workout in after, sneaking a lunch, running across the city to teach at the university, or to East Oakland to teach kids, to finally arrive home at 10pm. This was my regular weekly schedule. This was normal, for me and for all the freelancers I know.

The uncertainty around the “first act” of the pandemic really put things into perspective for me. Everyone wanted to *persist*. My emails were full of invitations to teach dance over Zoom, to rehearse, to perform—to keep working. At first, I wanted to, but after a few weeks, I realized that I had to say No for my own sanity, especially since it seemed like people didn’t understand that though they were not physically in my house, their energy was. My home is my retreat, my sacred space and, quite frankly, not everyone is welcome there.

Standing up for yourself in a field that insists we should feel “lucky” to be working at all can be daunting. Does a secretary feel lucky to take a message? No, that’s their job. Does a surgeon feel lucky to perform a surgery? I don’t believe so. Does an architect feel lucky to design a building? I doubt it. They were hired to do so. I would offer that the choreographer is lucky to have dancers interested in doing their work.

Saying No can be particularly daunting when you are Black and Queer as well. Systemic oppression in the dance field is ever present, along with tokenism, misogyny, biphobia, and homophobia from both straight and other

**ABOVE ALL, I WANT MY STUDENTS TO KNOW THEY
HAVE THE RIGHT TO WIELD THE POWER OF NO.**

queer identifying people. As a Black person, I am conditioned to cherish every experience to dance as if it were my last. This is inherited—I am constantly reminded of the impermanence of my existence and lack of access to resources in this country, historically and today. I am often second guessed, tested, pigeonholed, but I’ve been trained to accept the unacceptable because I know what it’s like to be without work.

I am reclaiming my time.

—CONGRESSWOMAN “AUNTIE” MAXINE WATERS

Dance is a constant psychological game of being an expert over my body, yet having very little agency over it. Whenever I’ve engaged in Western and European based dance forms as a professional dancer, I’ve offered my body to the ideas of others. There is a lot of power in being in the front of the room. And every time I have committed to a process, I’ve had to place a certain amount of trust in the choreographer. It’s an exchange that is programmed in me as part of the equation in the creative process. But what do we do when that trust is tarnished? How can we “reclaim our time,” energy, and mental and physical health?



As a Black artist I've often felt that my full range of emotion is not welcome in dance spaces. I should smile, stay pleasant, stay surface, maybe a little funny, and dance—tropes of minstrelsy. For example, after a 9am rehearsal, I was confronted by a director for bringing “animosity” into the room: “You don't smile anymore in rehearsal,” they said. I had nothing to smile about: it was 9am and I was, yet again, offering choreography that I would not be recognized for. But I was there, sweating and working. No longer willing to do this emotional labor, I reclaimed my time, saying, “Thank you so much. I quit.” I didn't feel like playing the “happy Negro” anymore.

Prior to this last straw, when I was on tour with this company, a flight attendant at the airport found it difficult to

say my name when reading off names on the tickets. Instead of attempting to pronounce it, or asking me how, she bypassed my first name and called me by my middle name, which is of European origin. As a person in an all white company with an “ethnic” first name, I felt singled out and ostracized in a way that I wasn't prepared for. When I corrected the flight attendant, some company members said, “Well your name is difficult... maybe you're just being too sensitive.” I am a person and an artist. And in art, there needs to be sensitivity, which is why I chose this career. My entire being—my body, my expression, my name—is under constant attack, institutionally, systemically, and artistically. And yet there is an expectation that I should be happy about it, or at least pretend to be. Well, that's a No for me.

I'm telling this story because people of color can gaslight themselves. And I want us to be able to recognize it when it happens and say No. Practicing saying No is just as important as any tendu or plié. But due to the pressure to feel “lucky” to work and a culture of disposability, saying No isn't easy. The first time I said No to a gig, I was afraid I would never be hired for anything again.

But that simply was not true.

I've booked literally dozens of gigs after that incident. When I framed my No as an attempt to preserve my well-being, the weight of my decision became easier to bear. In fact, every time I have had to excuse myself from a toxic process, dancers in that process have reached out to tell me how much they respected my choice. The truth is, after your first No every No after that is so much easier.

Dancers are curators of American culture. We are valuable and should be treated in high regard. If you are a dancer, I invite you to “reclaim your time” and energy, to begin to harness your No, so that when you finally say Yes you can give yourself fully to the artistic endeavor.

ARVEJON JONES is a Black, Queer, Bay Area based, freelance dance artist. He has performed with multiple dance companies and has toured throughout the United States. He is a lecturer at San Francisco State University, his alma mater. As an educator, he is passionate about relaying the Black origins of jazz to his students and the joy associated with his heritage.



IN CONVERSATION

WITH ANDRÉA SPEARMAN, DANCERS' GROUP ARTIST RESOURCE MANAGER

IN CONVERSATION is a series of interviews exploring exchanges about dance and different folks' relationship to dance.

We've previously had dialogues that were intergenerational in nature with Mid-career artists speaking with emerging artists about the expanding creativity of melding the mediums of dance and poetry, and about Black & Brown representation on stage and in leadership.

Now I'm speaking to individual artists, who provide insight into who they are, where they are going, and what they want to say.

In my recent attendance of the Dance/USA annual conference, I observed a connecting thread of reexamining and reframing relationships. Between presenters and artists, as well as between the individual artist or company and performers. There was a large concern and consensus that the old ways of arts leadership and structure must change quickly.

How are medium-large sized organizations providing access to mental health support services? In contract making, where are we including force majeure clauses?

How is everyone (funders, administrators, boards, companies, etc) staying in open communication with each other and their communities?

Community - a word that has gone beyond definition this past year. Especially in the Bay Area. The conversations that have been sparked are those of investigation, those of breaking down barriers, and those of not returning “back to normal.”

Please take a listen as I dive deep into conversation with [Erik Lee](#), a teacher, choreographer, and dancer with Dimensions Dance Theater. We address bringing spiritual practice to the stage with the bold choice of starting a dance company during a pandemic and how he plans on not “reopening” but opening new.

[La Mezcla](#) Founding Artistic Director **Vanessa Sanchez** and I discuss the shifting of relationships between funders and artists to more informal gatherings and open circles of communication. We also delve into strategies for white-led organizations to make concrete changes in their leadership and presentations of BIPOC artistry.

Vanessa Sanchez

Who's getting funded and who has access to getting funded? And really looking at a lot of my mentors in the Bay Area and beyond who... have changed and shaped communities and done this work for decades and decades and decades, but because of resources and because of language barriers, they aren't necessarily able to apply and receive the funding they should be. With that, I just felt it really important in that I don't want to be one of the only ones from the Bay Area - in our kind of world of dancers of color who are coming from dance forms from traditionally Black and brown communities - I don't want to be one of the only ones getting this. There are so many more people who need and deserve this - this funding. — VANESSA SANCHEZ



LISTEN HERE

Erik Lee

One of the things that I've been in conversation about is space, particularly for dancers of color and companies of color to have access to spaces that are in good condition. Owning space, being able to rent space - it's always the prevailing issue of: Where do we rehearse?



I'm very much so interested in this idea of opening new - it's not a reopening, I'm not trying to return to the way things were before - I'm really invested in how we move forward. — ERIK LEE



LISTEN HERE

PHOTOS BY: (LEFT) ALEXA TREVIÑO, (RIGHT) COURTESY OF ARTIST

THE MANIFESTO OF THE COLLECTIVE

By John Paul “JP” Alejandro

THE COLLECTIVE SF was co-founded on the site of another dance collective: Oberlin Dance Collective. Seven dance artists first sat down at Robin’s Café after our first improv session together at one of ODC’s studios. We had known each other somewhat from taking classes and attending auditions together. At some point we had all danced alongside each other, tired, sweaty, and anxious, vying for the same limited dance opportunities SF had to offer. After months of colliding with each other, our very own Niara Hardister took the initiative to assemble the most inclusive, supportive, and talented group of folks I know.



We sat outdoors at the cafe, sharing and unpacking our experiences and our feelings about the state of the SF concert dance community. As dancer-millennials living in the most expensive city in the US, and struggling to reckon with what Huffington Post writer Michael Hobbes calls “[the scariest financial future of any generation since the Great Depression](#),” we are also confronting a traditional audition model that leaves us feeling displaced within the community. All of us have studied dance history, longing to be like the early days of ODC or the Judsons, rejecting the confines of modern dance and offering non-hierarchical ways of choreographing and performing.

As a gay Filipino cis gender male, I often find myself participating in auditions that seem predetermined from the beginning in white dominated spaces that leave me feeling either tokenized or misunderstood. It has been pointed out to me that cliques and “rigged” auditions have been around for many generations, so I began to think about the ways older generations of dancers in the community serve as gatekeepers of an audition model that a lot of my millennial peers were getting tired of.

The audition process largely favors the same lucky few, and often the only feedback that the rest of us receive is, “You need more professional experience,” a long-standing catch-22. The barrier of entry is so high that getting something substantial on a dance resume to count as “professional experience” is the biggest challenge many younger dancers face.

Despite this, most of us are taught that auditioning is the only way to make it. But it’s a game of who, what, when, where, and how you know. No one tells you that networking is the name of the game in this industry. I found myself committing a lot of time to taking classes and intensives just to get seen by the people I wanted to work for. These things cost money, taking classes everyday can rack up some serious bucks, and prices for intensives geared towards pre-professionals and emerging artists are way too high for my budget.

In the meantime, most of us in this career limbo are working either full time jobs or balancing multiple jobs in order to support our living. As Collective SF member, Lacey Hefernan, once said, concert dance has no “middle class”; you are either at the top dancing full time, or working tirelessly to get the ball rolling at the bottom. Some say dancers are the original gig workers. But although the financial issues millennials face started long before the gig economy surfaced, narratives of the dancer working multiple jobs and still managing to make it to an unpaid rehearsal, the dancer who has an exhausting 9-5 and still has the energy to take a full dance class, and the dancer that is a choreographer, dancer, and business manager all at the same time in their own dance company, continue to run rampant.

At that first meeting at Robin’s Cafe, I felt comforted knowing I was not alone in my frustration and isolation. We started the Collective SF to address our economic and

creative anxieties. The Collective SF has no hierarchies. We are a community of like-minded individuals that teach classes to each other and create work for each other. We work on a rotating choreographer system to create work to give everyone a chance to lead. We share expenses for studio spaces, and any decisions about the collective need a majority vote. This has worked so well that we were able to create our first collective work, *Crisis Club*, led by our first featured Collective SF choreographer, Lucy Dillon. The work was showcased at Shawl Anderson’s 2020 Winter Salon and later presented at the 2020 PUSHfest Digital Festival.

As the Collective began to develop and expand, we knew that we did not want to follow a company model, the very system that isolated each of us from the community. We eliminated the auditioning process and invited people to the Collective, taking up administrative roles based on our strengths and interests. And though some people carry more responsibilities than others, everyone has equal voting power and plays a role in making executive decisions, including bringing new people into the Collective. We’ve established a network of artists around the Bay through which individuals in the Collective can reach out to each other to collaborate, mentor, or take classes together. As long as the development of the Collective responds to our mission to promote community, equity, and access for all artists, we know we’re doing something right.

The Collective SF is now eight members strong, a beacon of hope for millennial dancers working in the Bay Area, who feel beholden to an older generation that sometimes makes us feel like we need to pay homage before we can participate. I think the beautiful thing about millennials is that we are finally calling out these outdated systems because we want equity, diversity, and inclusion to be more than just the keywords of virtue signaling. For a long time, concert dance’s gatekeepers have held dancers to Western European standards of virtuosity and hierarchical structures. The Collective SF is composed of all different kinds of people dedicated to making everyone feel included, heard, and valued. That is its strength, and we hope that our existence continues to challenge the rigidity of concert dance practice, create opportunities for dancers outside the old audition model, and serve as an example that pursuing dance is accessible for everyone.

JOHN PAUL “JP” ALEJANDRO is a dancer, teacher, and personal trainer in San Francisco. He graduated in 2018 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a B.S. in Dance, where he received a full-tuition First Wave Scholarship for spoken word activism. In 2017, he attended the 30th Anniversary of the Bates Dance Summer Intensive in Maine. He has trained and worked with such choreographers as Chris Walker, Li Chiao-Ping, Michael Foley, Rennie Harris, and Gerald Casel. After returning to the San Francisco Bay Area, he joined PUSH Dance Company in 2020.



ROBERT MOSES' KIN

SOFT SOLACE SCREENING

Virtual Company Premiere of

“THE SOFT SOLACE OF A SLIGHTLY DESCENDED LOST LIFE (SUCK IT)”

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Friday, July 23, 6:30pm-8pm PST / 9:30pm-11pm EST | On demand through July 31

On YouTube Live and Zoom | Sliding scale tickets \$5-100 | The entire event will be closed-captioned

Learn more at robertmoseskin.org/events

ROBERT MOSES' KIN WORKSHOP

Friday-Sunday, July 23-25, 1:30pm - 5:30pm

Learn more at robertmoseskin.org/classes

\$60 per day, \$175 for the full workshop

A limited amount of financial support available for those in need. Please contact info@robertmoseskin for more details.





june 17 2021

stylish muscling



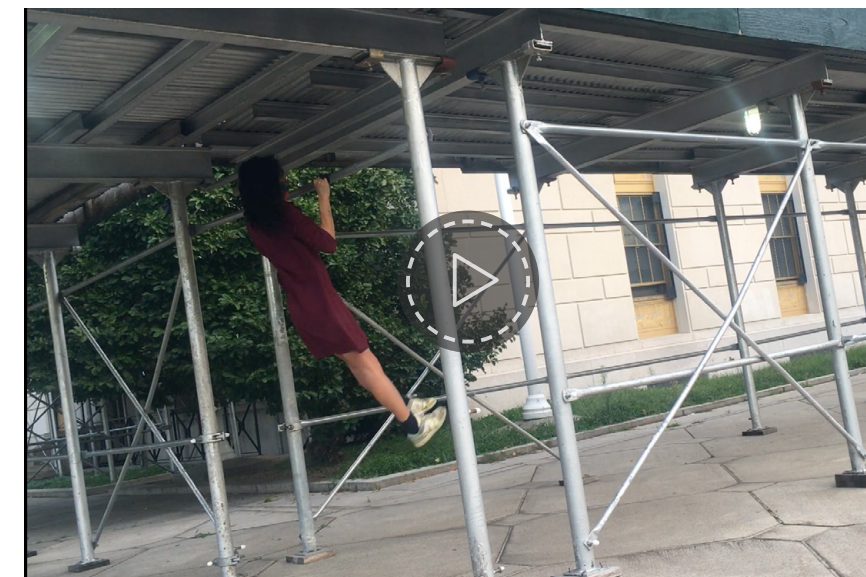
by *benedict nguyễn*

dear reader,

welcome to a special edition of [first quarter moon slush](#), a newsletter i started in 2018. in late-2020 editions, i wrote about [dancing outside](#), [running and biking](#), and [floating atop snow](#). in 2021, i've been questioning my relationship to [xtreme sports](#), including [dancing in the wind](#), [ice skating](#), and [weight lifting](#). this recent slushee era has been definitively meta and self-indulgently self-referential. it's also been curious to indicate, if vaguely 🦵👤, what other themes these modes of embodiment might suggest—from the urgency for enlivening sensation—in these uncertain times—to cycles of grief.

today's slushee is partly a memorial for Julia Cziller Redick, my first dance teacher who passed away in april. from our first lesson, she instilled in me a spirit of creative play, the necessity of functional movement 🦵👤, and a sense of taste and style. more than what that taste or style is, it's for protecting what [i always already](#) had that i celebrate her legacy in this slushee.

after getting my pull ups back on construction scaffolding last summer, one of my 2021 pet projects has been teaching my body to do a muscle up: a pull up that lifts the torso above the bar through fully extended arms.



my outdoor gym features three bars of varying heights (visual below!). i began using the lowest to train the distinguishing motion between pull up and muscle up: how to rotate my forearms, elbows, and shoulders from below to above the bar. when starting above, straightening my arms was easy. in lowering myself down (the negative motion), i taught my little neurons how to get in line 🦵👤 but getting them to reverse the negative and do the thing... unfathomable to february—me! but i would try!

when i first started lifting (i love how obnoxious this sounds tbh! more soon 🦵👤) six years ago, i was on the verge of so many injuries: reaggravated stress fractures in both legs (performing on a strip of marley atop a concrete stage for my first [#freelanceflailing](#) gig... sigh!) and very uncertain shoulder joint stability (which led to recurring trap/neck flare ups... yikes!) a

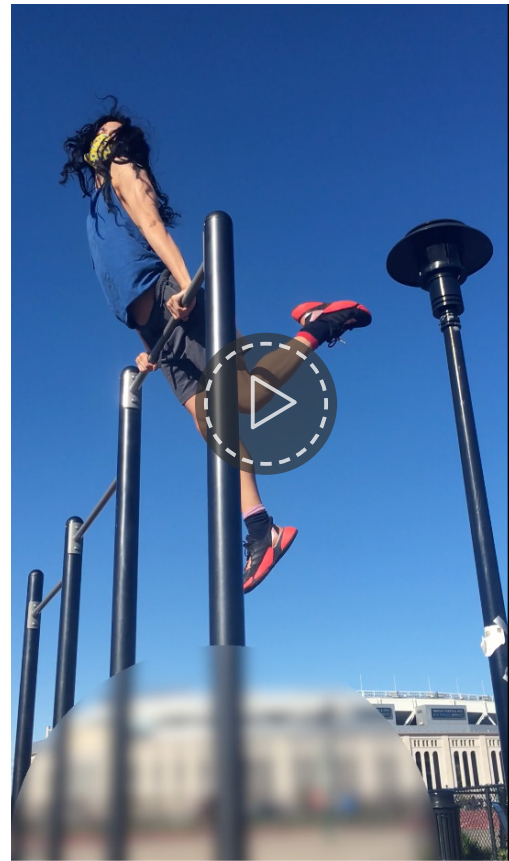
free physical therapy session sent me off with a set of exercises to help me—cross train—and so i took those exercises to a gym that offered free personal training (no sponcon here, iykyk) and built myself new shoulders—ones whose range of motion expanded because they were supported by a better coordinated core, back, and chest 🦵👤 it was magical to feel the capacity of my body change. my traps and neck stopped twinging. my shoulders stopped clicking at the slightest rotation.

much of weightlifting machines are designed to isolate muscle groups. they seem to suggest one will optimize the body by dividing it into its component parts. and even after discovering the best of [motion is actually circular via ice skating](#) in march, i really thought i was going to teach myself a muscle up by isolating my lats—as if they have the range to propel me up there!! maybe someday 🦵👤

it was raining one afternoon in april so lifting under scaffolding made it unsafe to work on the muscle up. but i dreamed about it that day, practicing partial motions til i (re)discovered a new trajectory of momentum—the circle, of course. the next day should be an off day for my back but it's sunny and i feel alive so i swing by the outdoor gym and decide to—manifest my dreams— 🦵👤

i clutch the bar, circle my torso opposite of where i'm trying to go and send my body around to do a muscle up on my first try. i scream with delight as i go from two feet below the bar to two feet over it in seconds. 0 to 60 within my own body. since then, i've been trying to do multiple in a row—i hit 5 once and not once since. maybe someday i'll do 10 or i'll do a buttery smooth linear one, hide the circle in my shoulder blades, and just shoot up like a rocket. yes, i am afraid of heights 🦵👤

from my years of lifting 🦵👤, i've known my progress to be wildly chaotic 🦵👤, managing unimaginable feats on days i'm exhausted and on others, despite being rested, barely managing 60% of my usual capacity. linearity, functionality, optimization, etc. etc.



are all tired false-hoods. as affects, they so often lack style, texture, or any interest at all. sure, i needed some base amount of strength to manage the feat, but ultimately, it was coordination and flow that vaulted me up. over this process, it was the friction of exertion that gives vitality and verve, rough edges making for a smooth flex.

and you could read this slushee as a [weird flex, but okay](#). with other histories of my body not shared here, it's a flex i'm shocked i can make at all.

you could read this slushee as a celebration of work—by which, i mean the physics kind and the self-help kind, but of course, the capitalism kind has an obvious investment in maximizing my capacity. the etymology of how they got called the same thing feels obvious and i'm not optimizing the body to do labor. among other concerns, i think often about self-defense, about being the brawn (no, i'm serious 🦵🥰) where such a capacity is useful. it will not always exist at this scale but while it's here,

i invite you to read this slushee through this demonic emoji pairing that i selected just for y'all 🦵🥰 the flex emoji as flashy brag; the halo emoji as a flex of such sweet innocence. the ironic distance required to use either of these symbols is long but to use them together requires great remove from the self as well as an earnest self-embrace to employ it with cheek, all without possibly provoking disdain from you, sweet reader 🦵🥰

but self-awareness should be the lowest bar to clear at this stage of the panorama, this stage of the US

settler-colonial state's worst imperialist violences being made so plain every day. there's nothing new about irony discourse, and yet... i'm curious about how the past year has revitalized horrified sarcasm as a kind of sincerity. this may not be a novel form of relating but it's not lacking in [affective potential](#)

the false dichotomy (happy gemini szn!) of intimacy and ironic distance interests me on this june 17th first quarter moon in virgo (the most self-critical of the moons) for much more than self-crit but rather, what it might suggest about the group workout 🦵🥰, about the [mediations possible](#) in a complex arena, about exercises and circles and disparate flows that can be accrete new capacities and better directions, always, of course, with style 🦵🥰

and while some artists obfuscate their intentions through [abstraction](#), there's little abstract about a muscle up. regarding [gymnastics](#), Lizzie Feidelson writes, "Bodies in a state of exertion are only ever earnest." the sport's physical feats are so literal and yet 🦵🥰, it's the choreographed and codified wristy flourishes—so campy, so borderline ironic—that epitomize the sport's movement vocabulary for me.

like art, sports may be [pay to play](#), and it's still a kind of job. there are laborers, their labor, and an office. but it's the seemingly small gestures, the signature moves that reveal a sector's people and the work that can happen in an environment. sure, you can watch my muscle up on loop but what a wholly different treat it would be to experience how i dance between sets, my flitting, fleeting little flourishes whose sparkle dissolves any office 🦵🥰!

benedict nguyễn is a dancer, writer, and curator based on occupied Lenape and Wappinger lands (South Bronx, NY). Their criticism has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *Into*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Shondaland*, and *the Establishment*, among others; their poetry, in AAWW's *the Margins*, *Flypaper*, and *PANK*. They've performed in DapperQ Fashion week and in recent works by Sally Silvers, José Rivera, Jr., Monstah Black, and more. As the 2019 Suzanne Fiol Curatorial Fellow at ISSUE Project Room, they created the multidisciplinary performance platform "soft bodies in hard places." They publish the newsletter "[first quarter moon slush](#)," and when not online [@xbennyboo](#), are working on their second novel.

benedict-nguyen.com

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PHOTO BY SHEILA BANNON, PICTURED: RUBY AVERY

Aerial Dance Marin

Experience the joy of flight with Aerial Dance Marin! Founded in 2014, they offer aerial silks, sling, and trapeze classes for kids and adults. [Learn more](#)



PHOTO BY SEBASTIAN ESTEVA

DANCE MONKS

Breathe Here/ Respira Aquí is an interactive movement and self-acupressure installation designed to support public health during times of turbulent change. This ongoing DANCE MONKS project will begin in Aug 2021 with appearances in the East Bay in collaboration with the local public and movement artists Rodrigo Esteva (b. Mexico), Mirah Moriarty (Slavic/US) and Sebastian Esteva (b. Mexico). [Learn more](#)

SOL VIDA WORLDWIDE

Join Sol Vida Worldwide's [Patreon community](#) where they are building The Embodied Revolution, a global movement collective centered on embodied healing justice. They offer resources, knowledge, and power through immersive experiences online and with meetups across the world. They are also teaching, booking for workshops and 1:1 Light Empowerment Sessions, and consulting for theatres, studios, and schools. [Learn more](#)

FLYAWAY PRODUCTIONS

Meet Us Quickly With Your Mercy
Oct 14-17, 2021 outside of 80 Turk St, SF
Featuring choreography by [Jo Kreiter](#), the piece asks the question: How can Black and Jewish voices amplify the call for racial justice via an end to mass incarceration? This second installment of *The Decarceration Trilogy*, *Dismantling the Prison Industrial Complex One Dance at a Time* is created in partnership with MOAD, Bend the Arc Jewish Action and Prison Renaissance.



PHOTO BY JESSICA MARIA REYNOS

RISING RHYTHM SF

[Rising Rhythm](#) is working diligently to secure a space in SF's Excelsior District for their 50+ artists and the larger historically exploited community they serve. By establishing permanent roots, they aim to amplify their message of celebrating cultural diversity and highlighting the authenticity of their neighborhood's dance community. Rising Rhythm is calling on YOU! Become a patron of the arts by investing in their future home and forever be a part of Rising Rhythm's legacy. [Learn more](#)

PAUL RENOLIS

[Paul Renolis](#) is a San Francisco-based queer performing artist, creative, educator, and writer. He has extensive training and experience in theatre, choreography & dance, and drag. Dance with Paul on Saturdays at 10:30am at Uforia Studios in SF's Nob Hill. His hip hop classes are taught alongside self-curated playlists that follow a specific beats-per-min journey. His classes are culturally informed and versatile in style. Paul also teaches at Uforia's Mission location, reopening this summer. Your first class is FREE. [Register online](#)



PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWENY

FACT/SF

[FACT/SF](#), a contemporary dance company known for their adventurous creations, Countertechnique workshops, and artist support services, is currently cooking up an exciting new production about queer identity formation. The new work, *Split*, will culminate in a series of 300 shows performed by one dancer and for one audience member at a time. Choreographed by Charles Slender-White, *Split* will premiere Sep 9 at CounterPulse with ongoing performances throughout the fall.



VIDEOGRAPHY: LOREN ROBERTSON PRODUCTIONS

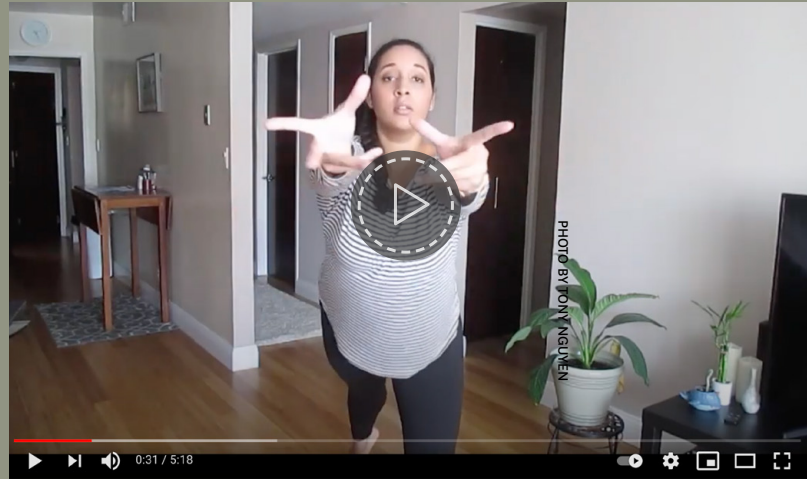
Kineteck Arts

[Kineteck Arts](#), directed by Daiane Lopes da Silva and Weidong Yang, combines the work of dancers, scientists, and digital artists to create innovative and socially responsible performances. Their monthly public gathering, Y-Exchange, invites discussion about performing arts, science and technology. Last Wednesday of the month 6-7:30pm PST



Dholrhythms Dance Company

Dholrhythms Dance Company has shared the rhythms of Punjab, India through classes, performances, and events for almost 18 years. They host the Non Stop Bhangra dance party and currently offer livestream Bhangra classes – a joyful experience that will get your heart pumping, shoulders bouncing, and you'll be smiling ear to ear while breaking a sweat. Check out their [current schedule](#).



Bay Area Dancers

Bay Area Dancers was created as an outlet for the young professional who still dreams of being on stage! Founded by Alicia Brewster & Trishna Saigal, this company of passionate dancers is brought together by a love of performing. Bay Area Dancers' flexible schedule enables dancers to choose their rehearsal schedule based on their availability.

[Learn more](#)



[uforia studios](#) is a fitness and dance studio driven by music and open to all! Come and try a dance class for free with promo code INDANCE. Sign up for classes and see the schedule on the [website](#).

PHOTO BY UFORIA STUDIOS



PHOTO BY GENEVIE PARKER

Ballet22

Founded in 2020 by Roberto Vega Ortiz and Theresa Knudson, [Ballet22](#) exists to push the boundaries of what is possible in ballet by focusing on producing and presenting works, ranging from classical to contemporary ballet, that break gender normative traditions, specifically by presenting men, mxn, and non-binary artists "en pointe." Follow them on [social media](#) to learn more about upcoming performances!



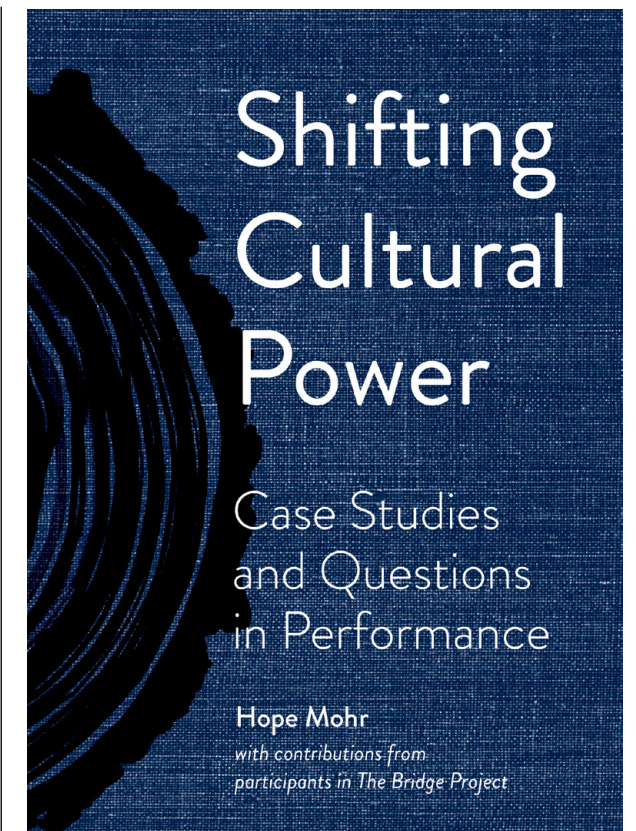
MoToR/dance

[MoToR/dance](#), directed by Evie Ladin, creates powerful percussive dance arrangements that reunite African diaspora polyrhythms with Appalachian/American traditional songs and that examine the cultural syncretism of white, black, and brown in foundational American music/dance. [#MoTorMonday](#)



Parangal Dance Company

[Parangal Dance Company](#) gives tribute to Philippine heritage by connecting Filipino Americans to their roots and educating diverse communities about Philippine culture. With support from ACTA, they're filming a documentary about the practice of Sagayan, a pre-Islamic dance of the Maguindanaon in Mindanao, Philippines. Artistic Director Eric Solano also teaches [online classes in Pangalay](#), a classical dance form of Ta'u Sug.



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

HOPE MOHR

Available for pre-order on June 21st, *Shifting Cultural Power: Case Studies and Questions in Performance* is a reckoning with white cultural power and a call to action. Based on the author's journey as a dancer, choreographer, and activist, as well as on her ten years of leading [The Bridge Project](#), the book locates the work of curating performance in conversations about social change, with a special focus on advancing racial equity in the live arts. Published by The National Center for Choreography and the University of Akron Press.

AMY SEIWERT'S IMAGERY WRITING ON DANCE

The intersection of dance and the written word can open up new avenues of understanding for artists and audiences alike, and it is at that fertile crossing of disciplines that we as a community can center and address the hard problems and pressing issues we face today. As Imagery's first Writer in Residence, Sarah Cecilia Bukowski goes beyond the non-verbal communication of ballet to express and investigate topics and issues of the art form we all love so dearly. [Read more](#)

Remembrance: Anna Halprin

[Anna Halprin](#), a longtime Marin County resident, spent her entire career in an effort to democratize dance and along the way lead the charge of the postmodern dance movement. She was 100 and died peacefully of old age on Mon, May 24. Anna radicalized dance and innovated new concepts of dance, healing and interdisciplinary arts that have influenced people in many fields. She bridged the concepts of performing arts and healing arts in ways that touched people all over the world.

New Home

[Levy Dance Studio](#) has moved. They are now located at 460 Gough Street, San Francisco and are open to the public for small rehearsals, classes, and limited rentals.

[SF Dance Gear](#) is now located at 551 Hayes Street. Appointments will be required as this new location is smaller and social distancing is still recommended. They offer professional pointe shoe fittings and expertise on all types of dance shoes, clothes, and accessories.

100K to Four Artists For Inaugural Fellowship



The new Rainin Fellowship launched by Kenneth Rainin Foundation and administered by United States Artists recognizes artists who push the boundaries of creative expression, anchor local communities and advance the field. Congratulations to the inaugural #RaininFellows in Dance, Film, Theater and Public Space who were awarded unrestricted grants of \$100K as well as tailored supplemental support.

- The 2021 Rainin Fellows are:
- Amara Tabor-Smith (Dance)
 - Margo Hall (Theater)
 - People’s Kitchen Collective (Public Space)
 - Rodrigo Reyes (Film)

<https://krfoundation.org/arts/partnerships/rainin-fellowship/2021-fellows/>

2021 Guggenheim Fellowships Announced

Congratulations to José Ome Navarrete Mazatl, co-director of [NAKA Dance Theater!](#) Fellowships were awarded to 184 artists, writers, scholars and scientists. Created in 1925 by Senator Simon and Olga Guggenheim in memory of their son John Simon Guggenheim, the Foundation has offered fellowships to exceptional individuals in pursuit of scholarship in any field of knowledge and creation in any art form, under the freest possible conditions. [Read more...](#)

Performing Arts Worker Relief Fund

- The relief fund has raised \$637,449
- Distributed \$550,000 to 738 performing arts workers in the Bay Area

Theatre Bay Area, InterMusic SF and Dancers’ Group are grateful to have been able to provide some amount of relief to these grantees with the help of more than 450 individual donors and funders, and the need remains. 119 applications on the waitlist are still waiting to be funded. [Learn more about how you can help.](#)

Spring 2021 CA\$H Grantees:

Dancers’ Group is pleased to announce it has awarded \$105,000 in grants to 16 artists and 14 organizations, featuring dance forms such as turf, kathak, contemporary, traditional Chinese, Korean, Middle Eastern, and Congolese dance, and more. Many of the works focus on the experiences of BIPOC artists, and many projects directly address issues of identity, oppression, and racism. Each grantee will receive \$3,500.

ARTISTS

- [Byb Chanel Bibene](#)
- [Elizabeth Boubion](#)
- [Erik Lee](#)
- [Evie Ladin](#)
- [Farah Yasmeen Shaikh](#)
- [Ishika Seth](#)
- [Julie Crothers](#)
- [Malia Byrne](#)
- [Marcelo Solis](#)
- [Megan Lowe](#)
- [Nicole Maria Hoffschneider](#)
- [Olivia Eng](#)
- [Ousseynou Kouyate](#)
- [Rasa Vitalia](#)
- [Sammay Dizon](#)
- [Sara Shelton Mann](#)

Organizations

- [Afro Urban Society](#)
- [Alyssandra Katherine Dance](#)
- [Antara Asthaayi Dance](#)
- [Bellwether Dance Project](#)
- [Dancing Around Race](#)
- [Dawsondancesf](#)
- [Detour Dance](#)
- [Dohee Lee Puri Arts](#)
- [GERALDCASELDANCE](#)
- [Helen Wicks Works](#)
- [Mud Water](#)
- [Pateldanceworks](#)
- [RoundAntennae](#)
- [Vishwa Shanthi](#)

ANNIVERSARIES

10 YEARS

SAN FRANCISCO AWAKKO REN

Celebrating 10 years of artistry, [San Francisco Awakko Ren](#) is a Bay Area Awa Odori group founded in 2011 by Tokushima Kenjin-Kai. Awa Odori is a Japanese dance driven by the beat of the Kane bell and Taiko Drum.

25 YEARS

KENDRA KIMBROUGH DANCE ENSEMBLE

For 25 years [Kendra Kimbrough Dance Ensemble](#) (KKDE) has bridged diverse cultures and communities through thought-provoking performances that address the common human experience. The Ensemble creates and presents dance works that build upon a wide array of dance genres, including a fusion of modern dance with movement from African, Brazilian, and North Indian cultures.

40 YEARS

BERKELEY BALLET THEATER

Berkeley Ballet Theater celebrates 4 decades of connecting community members with one another. [BBT’s 40th Anniversary Blog](#) shares stories, interviews, photographs, and more to commemorate BBT’s milestone anniversary.



D S D T
STUDIO
210
40 YEARS

Studio 210 Residency

Join Studio 210 for an evening of virtual performances and discussion by Summer Residents Angela Arteritano and Alyssandra Katherine Dance, and help Studio 210 celebrate 10 years of providing residency opportunities to Bay Area artists! July 30th & 31st at 6pm. held on Zoom. Applications for Winter 2022 Residency open August 16, 2021. Info at [DeborahSlater.org/Residency](#)

CHRYSALIS



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The premiere presenter of tribal
and contemporary Pilipino arts.

2021 PROJECTS



July
Musalaya's Gift
a fantasy novel by
Conrad J. Benedicto



October
Manong Is Deity
a film by
Alleluia Panis



Parol Lantern Festival
Featuring Dancing
in the Light by
Sydney Loyola

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