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P.12 Dancing Archivists



P.48 Jazz: Digging Deeper



P.38 My Roots of Movement

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(see Kularts article page 52)

WELCOME

By [Sima Belmar](#), Guest Editor

WHEREVER YOU ARE IN THE WORLD, if you are a dancer who wants to write about dance or you know a dancer who does, please message me. I have an opportunity for you/them.

I tweeted this request on July 10, when hot (flash) mom summer seemed to be on. But the hope, calm, and excitement were short-lived. Variants. Inequitable global vaccine distribution. Afghanistan. Bezos in space. Texas. Nevertheless, dozens of dancers from around the world responded to my call, each with a story to tell.

As the pandemic inches toward one thousand and one nights and beyond, stories have the power to get us through to morning. The people of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, fleeing a 14th century plague, have moved beyond the pages of college literature syllabi into our contemporary imagination. Stories, especially true stories, seem to settle us when the ground won't stop shaking. Whenever I respond to a story with an "Oh, yeah? Me too!" or "Wow! I had no idea," I feel less alone.

The stories in this issue represent voices from and perspectives on the dance world often left out of the historical record. When one writer worried that her story wouldn't be of interest to anyone, I said, "Do you think the largely white, largely cis-male, largely straight voices that dominate the archives ever worried whether their stories would be of interest to anyone?" The active silencing of stories naturalizes the idea that only some voices matter. And the ways we in the West have long privileged the written word as a locus of knowing over bodily wisdom has made it all the more urgent that we tell our dancing stories.

Sarah Nguyen and Hallie Chametzky engage in a feisty, transcontinental dialogue over archival practices in dance and the concept of the body as archive. On opposite sides of the world, unbeknownst to each other, Bianca Mendoza and Thobile Jane Maphanga reflect on their circuitous dance journeys through the Western canon to the indigenous dances of their cultural backgrounds, while Ishika Seth mines her dance training to uncover an ever-evolving definition of Indian Contemporary Dance. Chiara Giovanni addresses the challenges dance presenters face as they seek to align their political commitments with their programming practices through the example of Dominican bachata. Emma Garber and Ashley Gayle turn their ballet and jazz backgrounds over in their hands to examine the ways their respective dance forms are habitually historicized. Julia Davidson argues that the oft-maligned Strip Mall Dance Studio is a space of real dancing. And Alyssa Manan-sala charts the extraordinary journey of Alleluia Panis and Kularts, thinking through questions of indigeneity and diaspora in the context of Filipinx art-making.

Together, these essays convey frustration, anger, wistfulness, confusion—the stories they tell are unsettling and unsettled. And yet, underneath (or alongside, or mixed within) is a boundless love for dance. So as we continue to traverse tremulous ground, I hope you'll find some solace, if not stability, in dance.

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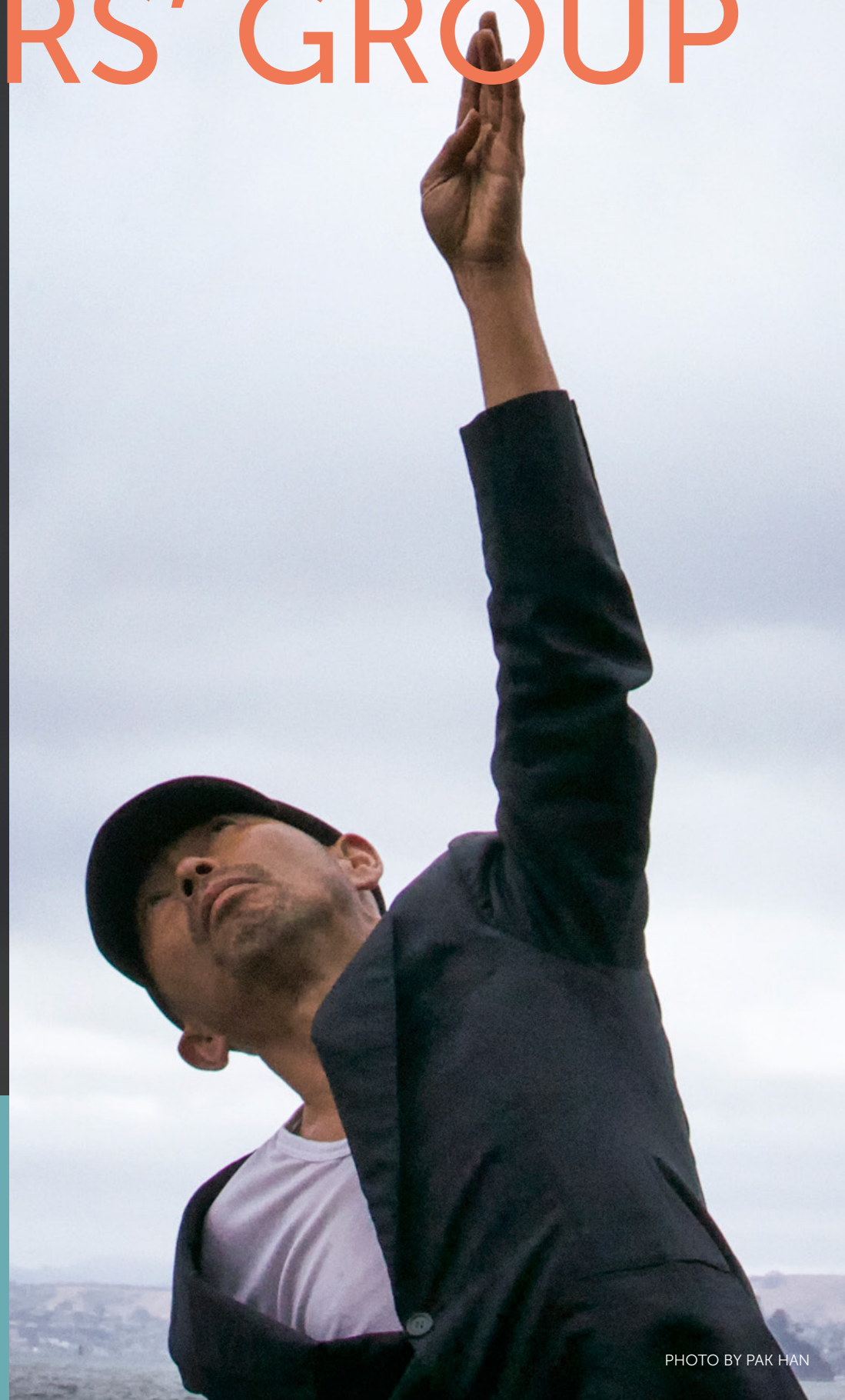


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Hallie Chametzky

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Dancing Archivists: A Conversation

By Hallie Chametzky and
Sarah Nguyễn

HALLIE CHAMETZKY AND SARAH NGUYỄN are archivist dance-makers who met at the Mark Morris Dance Group Archives, where Sarah was working and Hallie was visiting, in the fall of 2019. Since then, they have worked together at Dance/USA where Hallie is the Archiving Specialist and Sarah is a 2020/2021 Archiving & Preservation Fellow working with AXIS Dance Company. Their shared interest in how legacy, memory, materiality, and the sharing of information inform them as movement artists brings them together in this forum. What follows is a series of musings on how their relationship to making and thinking about dance and performance is intertwined with their professional archiving practices.

Who are we? Why are we talking about dance & archives?

Hallie Chametzky: While studying dance and choreography in college, I was selected for a Fellowship in the dance collections at the Library of Congress. That was my crash course training in archives — processing and making available materials from the Martha Graham Legacy Project. It blew my mind that I was able to get up close and personal with materials that belonged to modern dance icons and had hardly been handled since the early-to-mid-twentieth century. I worked a lot with papers related to the New Dance Group, who I consider my dancestors because of their radical, socialist, egalitarian approach to concert dance. I kept applying to dance archives gigs, which are fairly few and far between, and I'm now really lucky to work for Dance/USA, where I offer archives education, resources, and services to living, working artists, especially those who have been historically marginalized in the dance world and the archival record.

I wanted to talk about dance making and archiving work with you, Sarah, because I haven't met many archivists who also have an ongoing

“If my artist brain and my archivist brain were a venn diagram, there would be a big overlap in the middle, but also some space on the sides” —HALLIE

ing movement practice, and I'm curious about the ways you see those two worlds colliding. If my artist brain and my archivist brain were a venn diagram, there would be a big overlap in the middle, but also some space on the sides. I also saw your piece *30 x 3 virgin remy*: \$200 OBO recently, and I could see how memory, history, and the body are intertwining for you.

Sarah Nguyễn: I'm excited you saw my piece, Hallie! It was the first time I presented a work that's directly about my ancestors, so it felt vulnerable yet healing. As an information

science researcher and dancer, I'm interested in how lived experiences turned memories can translate to artful movement. I started to explore this idea when I started my Masters in Library and Information Science program and processed and digitized records for the Mark Morris Dance Group Archives.

I grew up in studio competition dance so I never really considered myself a dance artist; it felt too formulaic, commercial. But when I interned at Luna Dance Institute library, I was introduced to critical inquiry and creative movement, which broadened my understanding of the mutable boundaries of dance. Now that I've been a Dance/USA Archiving Fellow for AXIS Dance Company's archives for two years, I've come to accept myself as both a researcher and creator of movement and information. Seeing

your work, Hallie, *Songs for Women, Songs for Men*, I'm fascinated to learn more about your experience integrating archives into your dance practice.

What is your relationship with the concept of the “body as archive” or the more general increased interest in “the archive” by movement artists?

SN: For me, the term “archive(s)” in relation to body and movement artists is an exploratory fifth dimension intersecting information, memory, and the tangible physical body

in one space. It's not a new concept or method, but the nuances that differentiate information and memory on the physical body versus on visual or text documentation is often overlooked. After years of research and practice in information organization and dance, I look at what it means to create dance as my body ages and then share these creations for public access. Four different influences come to mind with this question:

First, there's Tonia Sutherland's archival research, which looks at how archives and memory can be preserved through non-print mediums. Sutherland focuses on dance and stories passing through generations of Pacific Islander and Black communities. In particular, her work explores Dunham Technique vocabulary as a means to decolonize archival praxis¹, the impact of digital records on Black bodies², and Black communities' use of digital social media as a means to create performative, autonomous, and liberatory spaces.³ Her perspectives on the violence that existing archives have had on oppressed bodies resonate with me as I navigate through misrepresentation and undocumented of my ancestors.

Then there's the choreographic workshop that David Roussève,

director of David Roussève/REALITY, taught in preparation for his New York premiere of *Halfway to Dawn*,⁴ where we learned about Roussève's process incorporating archival documents of the politically active jazz artist, Billy Strayhorn, into movement and onto the stage. It was the first time I experienced intentional archival references in a class/rehearsal space and saw how dancers can reinterpret a choreographer's intellectual embodiment of archival records. I was inspired by the dancers' ability to uplift marginalized souls and voices and weave in the “past, present, and fantasy,” as they created relationships with each other, the music, and quotes from Strayhorn's diary entries on stage.

Third, I think of Kathy Carbone's research on activating archival materials. She re-imagines archival documents to commemorate the lives of the original creators and subjects of the archive,⁵ a way to better understand, represent, and re-describe the intentions of a record outside of the colonial perspective that has been traditional to archival practices.

Last, there's the concept of “jazz time,”⁶ which posits that music, dance, and lived experiences are never compartmentalized or segregated

from each other. Instead, lived experiences are interwoven throughout the past, present, and future of individuals' memories, movement creations, and daily life. This places value in the often forgotten care and maintenance needed to address traumas and narratives stored within archives, especially when we look at sustainability of born-digital records, such as those created by artists and hosted/published on third-party proprietary platforms owned by Big Tech companies.

HC: I feel that there is real truth to the idea that we are repositories for knowledge that we can pursue through movement, ritual, and embodiment. In a totally different (and maybe more concrete) vein, I'm torn about other ways that I'm seeing “archive” used in the performance world. On the one hand, I'm delighted that more artists are considering their bodies and movements as part of a lineage. I'm all for expanded notions of the archive, especially because “the archive” has been controlled for far too long by institutional, colonial forces.

On the other hand, there are also artists who claim to be “archiving” their work by curating selections of pieces and processes on social media or YouTube. Without being too

critical, I cringe a bit at the self-proclaimed artist-archivists who think that videoing and sharing their work is by default an archival process. Social media websites claim a level of copyright ownership over the posts shared on them. They are fully within their right to use posts shared by users however they wish, including removing them from the site completely. What kind of archive has so little control over its materials? An archive that isn't concerned with who is granted ownership of the materials or whether they disappear without notice would be a sloppy archive indeed. Considering the ethics of the platform by which you share information is an essential part of responsible archiving, but it's not very sexy. It's easier to think of “the archive” as simply any collection of interesting stuff.

There's a difference between conceptual ideas of the “body archive” and this sloppy internet archive I'm complaining about. But both seem to come from the same place of increased interest among dance artists in participating in and creating lineage and history. If artists wanted to, say, establish a digital guerilla archive where they can share and preserve work outside of a

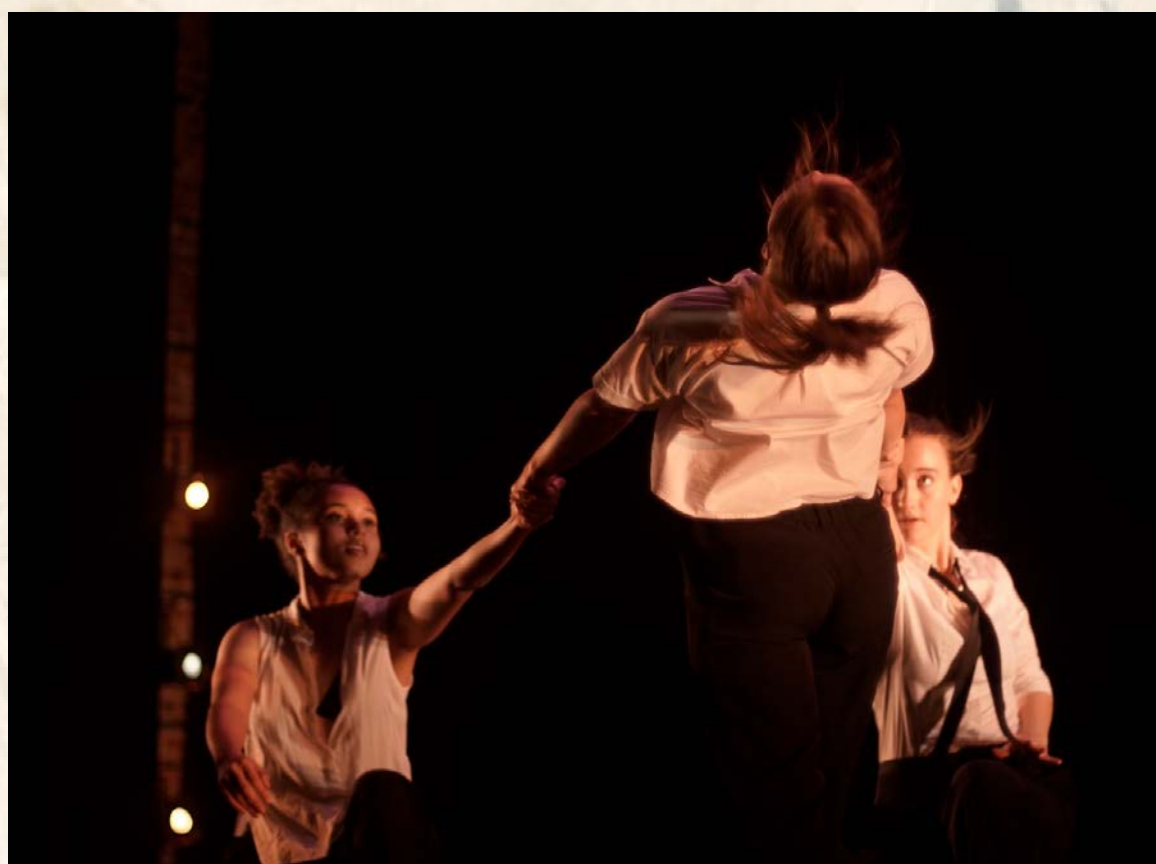


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“Inspired by Jeff Fridman’s research on oral histories and ‘time consciousness and embedded communications,’ I recorded an oral history with my mother about her life as a six-year-old in rural Việt Nam during 1972-1974.” —SARAH

traditional institutional context, I would be their number one fan. It’s all about caring for the materials, which involves an entirely different sort of labor than curating a social media page.

How does your archival practice show up in your dance making and vice versa?

HC: I tend to be a structural choreographer; the form or arc of a dance comes to me before the details of the movement. I find that so much of building, maintaining, and

understanding the archive is the same in that one has to get this broad, overarching feel for the narrative of the materials before getting too involved with details. I enjoy going on a detective hunt to identify a mysterious face in a blurry photograph, but without understanding the full scope of the materials and building the containers and categories that contextualize them, it can be self-defeating to get bogged down in those minute details. No one object in the archive is distinct; context and interrelationships are key to our understanding.

The same is true for me in making a dance. No one movement exists as a discrete action. The arc of the piece has to make sense to me before I can get hung up on specific gestures or phrases. And before I can shape the structure of the piece, I have to do my deep research and learning, which often includes study of history, texts, and the archive. So it’s a big cycle.

Songs for Women, Songs for Men came out of my thoughts on sacred and secular gendered ritual acts, and how ritual can be both a tool of liberation and oppression. The title

is taken directly from the title of a dance by Sophie Maslow whose archival papers I processed at the Library of Congress. Maslow’s dances dealt a lot with Jewishness, as do mine, and I liked the idea of following the Jewish tradition of naming after the dead. The piece uses archival Hebrew and Yiddish music, and also features archival recording of my grandmother, the late poet Anne Halley, reading her poems.

I made this piece in an academic context and received quite a bit of feedback from my teachers and peers that was critical of how difficult it was to understand portions of the poems because of the quality of the archival audio. I was frustrated and baffled by this as someone who

delights in the fundamental incompleteness of both live performance and the archival record.

I don’t believe I’m entitled to an experience of live performance which leaves me with clarity. Live dance is created in the gap between the audience and the performer(s). Similarly, the archival record is composed of more gaps and silences than pieces of knowledge and information. Our contemporary bodies encountering an archive are not owed total understanding. The intimacy generated by encountering archival materials is entirely one-sided; the contemporary party voyeuristically projects meaning and significance onto materials that have been curated by the whims and preferences of time. It’s crucial that we

all have the ability to feel grounded in legacy and history. We must insist upon new, anti-colonial models for equitable archiving so that the legacies of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people who have historically been excluded from archival record and practice can connect with legacy materials in the ways white people have long had access to. Still, I believe that none of us are owed a comprehensive, uncomplicated picture of any person or event from the past. Our ancestors were just as complex and multilayered as we are, and our encounters with archives cannot ever give us access to their full personhood, even as they can offer profound connection to legacy and history. I am arguing for privacy for the dead, even as I work in a field

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SARAH NYUGEN

which offers access to their materials—another gray area which I hope to activate in my creative work.

SN: Ugh, your piece and description is so beautiful, Hallie. It reminds me of the idea that there is no such thing as a neutral archivist or archives and each viewer brings in their own biases and relationships that shape the narrative. In contrast, my recent work is more about creating archives for the stories that have been traditionally invisibilized by institutional archives, so my intentions are to center the underserved voices even if they don't follow "archival best practices."

In September 2020, a few personal life events happened in the midst of the pandemic and heightened social inequalities: I graduated from a Masters in Library and Information Science program, I moved from New York City back to the West Coast, and I started an Information Science PhD program (first generation in my family). Also, I'd been growing out my long, pin straight, thick, black, virgin (no chemicals) and remy (cut and tied in its natural direction) hair for a decade and it was time to cut it. In light of these moments, I conjured an experimental dance film in preparation to shave my hair and start fresh. This is the contemporary history that motivated the dance film you saw in March 2020, *30 x 3 virgin remy: \$200 OBO*.

Inspired by Jeff Friedman's research on oral histories and "time consciousness and embodied communication," I recorded an oral history with my mother about her life as a six-year-old in rural Việt Nam during 1972-1974. Her memories navigate her auntie's long hair, how it symbolized luxury and malevolence, even though her auntie was the only family member who accepted her parents' forbidden mixed Teochew and Vietnamese marriage. After my mother's father was imprisoned by the Communist party and her mother was banned from bringing her mixed heritage children into her parents' home, my mother's

auntie generously took my mother and her siblings in to live and work on her farm. In collaboration with musician and video artist, Ramin Rahni, we created movement and music following the story's disjointed narration that is common to many immigrants' storytelling of past traumas. After more than 45 years, this was the first time my mother was comfortable recalling and sharing these fragmented memories, similar to the complex and multi-layer identities you mentioned, Hallie.

To accompany the oral history, we browsed Library of Congress catalogs, Internet Archive, and other homegrown online libraries to pull inspiration from Việt Nam specific musical instruments, dance, apparel, and imagery. It was disappointing to find the majority centered images from a U.S. soldier's perspective, exoticization of Vietnamese villagers, or tropical tourism. Luckily, I had access to old family albums. I digitized and incorporated these paper ephemera into the dance film.

Similar to what you said, Hallie, there's much labor and context involved in building an archive; I had to do the tedious labor to situate the context of my mother's budding archive and set up a stable 3-2-1 backup plan — the foundational backup strategy that any person concerned with preservation should follow. In short, 3-2-1 means creating three copies of the object to be preserved, saving each copy in three different locations, saving one copy for daily access, and the other two for longer term storage.

Existing archives do not represent my Vietnamese American experience, so I create dance using archival materials as a means to regenerate memories as a reimagined creative space, moving through and with trauma without letting the sorrow overpower potential joys and justices in life.

HALLIE CHAMETZKY (she/her) is a performer, choreographer, writer, and archivist gratefully residing in East Harlem, New York City. Her choreographic work unites movement and text in

dance theater events that often feature archival audio, images, and research sources. Her work seeks to interrogate societal ideas of historical and contemporary womanhood and embraces Jewish themes and the activism and leftist politics which are central to her Jewishness. Hallie is currently a Fellow at the Performance Project at University Settlement. Her recent work has been shown by transvisions, Undiscovered Countries, The Craft, and 7Midnights Physical Research. In addition to her dance practice, Hallie's poems have been published by Gigantic Sequins, Indolent Books, and Z Publishing House, and her writings on dance have appeared in The Brooklyn Rail, Contact Quarterly, Dance Magazine, and Dancegeist Magazine. She has held roles in dance archiving at the Library of Congress, Jacob's Pillow, and Dance/USA.

SARAH NGUYỄN (she/they) is an information researcher and movement practitioner, investigating the ephemerality of dance, the processes and ethics of preservation and representation, misinformation crises among diasporic communities, and privacy of sensitive data. In collaborations with experimental video and audio artists, they use archival records, oral histories, and analog and digital technologies to reimagine memories of trauma. Previously, Sarah contributed to programs that advocate for openness and preservation of at-risk media: CUNY City Tech Open Education Resources, Preserve This Podcast, software reproducibility with NYU Bobst, and the Mark Morris Dance Group Archives. Her recent works have been presented at The Craft, 92Y Mobile Dance Film Festival, the Northwest Film Forum's Local Sightings Film Festival, and various technology conferences. Currently, Sarah is a PhD student at the University of Washington Information School, and Archives Fellow for Dance/USA and AXIS Dance Company.

- 1 Sutherland, Tonia. 2019. "Reading Gesture: Katherine Dunham, the Dunham Technique, and the Vocabulary of Dance as Decolonizing Archival Praxis." *Archival Science* 19(2): 167–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09308-w>
- 2 Sutherland, Tonia. 2017. "Making a Killing: On Race, Ritual, and (Re)Membering in Digital Culture." *Preservation, Digital Technology & Culture* 46(1): 32–40. <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/pdtc-2017-0025/html>
- 3 Sutherland, Tonia. 2019. "Social Media and the Black Travel Community: From Autonomous Space to Liberated Space." <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/59657>
- 4 <https://www.bam.org/dance/2018/halfway-to-dawn>
- 5 Carbone, Kathy Michelle. 2017. "Artists and Records: Moving History and Memory." *Archives and Records* 38(1): 100–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2016.1260446>
- 6 The concept of "jazz time" was brought up during a series of classes with Nia-Amina Amor, movement artist and educator (<https://velocitydancecenter.org/artists/nia-amina-minor/>), during the Seattle Festival of Dance + Improvisation 2021 summer series. Their workshop series was titled "The Move: Experiments from Inside the Groove" where we explored the history of Black social dance, jazz, and rhythm through movement of our bodies.



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Original, Live Sound by Cheryl Leonard
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we write ourselves as we move

by THOBILE JANE MAPHANGA

I WAS BORN, in the early 1980s in the coastal city of Durban, South Africa, to a nurse and a lawyer. My parents named me after their mothers: Bathobile Angeline Maphanga and Jane Mgijima. I grew up in the township of Clermont, which sits approximately 20km west of Durban in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Clermont was one of the first areas where Black South Africans could buy and own small properties during apartheid. My grandmother Bathobile had bought a couple of properties to ensure that her kids would always have a roof over their heads, and the house we lived in together she willed to me, her first and only grandchild, at the time of her death. I write from the comfort of this home now, almost 40 years later.



SOUNDS OF MY YOUTH

Although I'm an only child, my home was always full. Aunts, cousins, and family friends who had come seeking shelter from less favourable inland parts of South Africa, or to work or study in Durban, often stayed with us as they found their feet. As a result there were many tongues spoken in our home. My mother was from Kimberley in the Northern Cape, approximately 800 km west of Durban. The Northern Cape is where the original languages of the ta, Khoi and San people were spoken in their various dialects, eventually mixed with the languages of the migrating Nguni

tribes and with those of the Dutch and then English Settlers. Many of these languages and their dialects, which were not preserved nor made official South African languages, have been forgotten and lost.

South Africa is an incredibly diverse country; each area has its own distinctive culture, language, and way of being. My mother, who was born to a Zambian father and Xhosa mother, had grown up in an area where Sepedi, Setswana, and Afrikaans were, and still are, the predominant languages. My father, born in Natal to a Zulu woman, father unknown, spoke isiZulu and some English, but moved to live with his aunt in Kimberley when his mother married a Sesotho man. By the time he returned to Durban as a married man, my

father spoke five languages.

I remember as a small child my parents would fight in Afrikaans, the language of the oppressive apartheid government, which they had been forced to learn in school. They assumed I wouldn't understand them because Natal, the last outpost of the English, was not an Afrikaans-speaking province. But by the time I was enrolled in St. Mary's Diocesan School for Girls (DSG) in 1991, I could express myself in isiZulu, Setswana, Afrikaans, and English, and understood isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Sesotho.

St. Mary's DSG was a world that Black people had had no access to until the 1990s. It was, and remains, a pristine, all girls private school with boarding facilities in the hills of Kloof,

Back and forth, I have moved between learning and unlearning

less than 10km from my home. Upon being dropped off for the first time at nine years old, my then widowed mother looked me straight in the eyes and commanded me to speak English and read as much as I could, before hugging me goodbye that summer afternoon. She had to put me into the boarding program because the only way she could afford the fees was if she took on extra work. Working night shifts at the hospital and moonlighting as an occupational nurse at various plants and factories during weekdays, I only saw my mother during holidays or mandatory half terms for the next ten years. She only got a full night's rest every second week and on weekends for the duration of those ten years. Understanding her determination to give me the best education she couldn't afford, I was determined not to let her sacrifices go to waste.

I was the only Black girl in my class and the youngest Black kid in boarding when I started at St. Mary's. It was a rule that no vernacular languages were to be spoken on school grounds. I made friends with the youngest boarder, a white girl from Zululand, whose parents would sometimes take me home with them on the weekends. I learned to ride bikes and horses on their rose and sugar cane farm. She introduced me to modern dance, which would become a place of solace for me, the dance studio one of the only places where I felt fully comfortable, where I didn't have to think, I could just do, and my body did, with ease.

SEEKING VOICE

I remember in high school fighting with the head of boarding, who didn't want to allow me a pass out to perform at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre when my dance teacher had arranged for us to be part of a show that featured studios from around the city. I think that was the first time I had ever fought for what I really wanted, and won. St Mary's offered a wide range of extramural activities from music, ballet, and Spanish dancing to squash, gymnastics, and diving. Modern dance was the only thing I did religiously—I never missed a class in nine years. Winning my first significant fight for my freedom to express myself through dance gave me the power to stand up for what I wanted and unleashed my voice.

At the university currently known as Rhodes, I discovered physical theatre and contemporary dance. I loved how it encouraged individuality and, at first, I was surprised that people without dance backgrounds were allowed to participate. I was soon asked to train and perform with the resident dance company, The First Physical Theatre Company, becoming one of the youngest student performers to be allowed in the company back then. We learned and used various techniques like Horton, Graham, and Laban. I never really wondered about what other dance forms existed outside the western canon I had been exposed to. It's only more recently that I remember once, whilst

still at school, my aunt asking if I wanted to learn the dances that izintombi zakwaZulu (young Zulu maidens) learned. To her face, I politely declined; I was a St. Mary's girl after all. Privately I scoffed, thinking, what would I do with that? Having had limited to no contact for so many years with any of my indigenous cultures, I didn't understand the value or opportunity I was being offered.

Recently, in my return to academic study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and in the process of trying to decolonize my mind through acknowledging, questioning, and unlearning my perspective on life and education, I have begun to consider both my dance and verbal language lineages. In a similar way that English is my go-to language through conditioning, although it is neither my mother's nor my father's tongue, modern/contemporary dance are my go-to vocabularies. It's a lot easier to identify the verbal disparity, but I find myself struggling to determine my true dance language. I express myself in certain ways based on the rules and limitations of each language.

As Frantz Fanon (1952) writes, *"To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation"* (Fanon, 1952: 17-18).

Having attended a private boarding school where I was forced to express

PHOTO BY THOMAS SWEET-HARVEY



PHOTO BY THOMAS SWEET-HARVEY

myself only in English and was exposed to western concert dance forms for ten years, I grew a heightened appreciation for a culture that was not mine. In what was once a desperate attempt to sound as proper as possible and escape the burden of being an uneducated Black, so as to gain access to opportunities that people who looked like me couldn't, I failed to hold on to my own home languages in support of another's civilization.

In acknowledging this conditioning and its effect on how I express myself, I consider my learned languages and my lost languages in my most recent dance film, *Sihamba Sizibhala* (loosely translated from isiZulu as “we write ourselves as we go/move”).

THE NEGOTIATIONS

As I struggle to reconcile my learned languages (English and Modern dance) and my lost languages (isiZulu, seTswana, and personal movement style), I sometimes sound/look foolish and inarticulate when I resort to my lost languages, and affected in my learned languages. I've been called “coconut” or a “clever Black” as I try to balance on an ever sharp knife edge. This teetering became one of the main narrative threads of the choreography for my film.

I used improvisational techniques to create and then dismember dance phrases that use steps evident in modern and contemporary dance, such as pliés, lunges, and grand battement. The phrases repeat and grow as the film progresses, colliding with physical theatre elements, gestural language, and pedestrian movement. The phrases are captured from different angles and at varying speeds. The sections are overlapped to create concurrent lines of narrative that layer journey and disruption.

My editing process parallels the choreographic process. Rather than

using editing tools to make my film “sound proper,” I chose to amplify the tension between perfection and reality, to reveal the cracks in a way that starts to blur what is a mistake, what is improvised, and what is rehearsed. This act of revealing my shaky bits is risky on three counts—as a dancer, woman, and Black, I am held to impossible standards. In revealing my flaws, I empower myself by owning my imperfections. The edit follows the movement of the mistakes I make while dancing.

The film is set mainly in two locations. First, I move along the dusty pathway of an open field with wintry dried grasses, never making it onto the tarred road at the end. My movement vocabulary is linear and repetitive here, a series of multiple attempts at the same choreography that I purposefully rehearsed barefoot, on stable ground, and then performed in boots on uneven terrain. My balance is shot at first, but the more times I run the phrases the better it gets. As I tire, my sweat becomes visible. I repeat the phrase at varying speeds, allowing the camera to keep rolling a little after I falter, capturing my reactions. Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I swear, sometimes I keep going. My costume in this space is an old turquoise bridesmaid's dress that belonged to an aunty of mine, found in an old suitcase that also features in the film. Other props include a well thumbed Oxford dictionary, a history book titled *The European World 1870-1961*, and my old South African passports.

The second location is an opening in a cool, green bamboo forest. Here, my movements became limited and shaky on the unstable, decaying ground. The choreography plays on two polarities, erratic and quiet. There are no props in this location; the costume is two identically patterned kaftans that belonged to my mother, one black, the other white.

The sound score moves between Bach's “Unaccompanied Solo Sonata

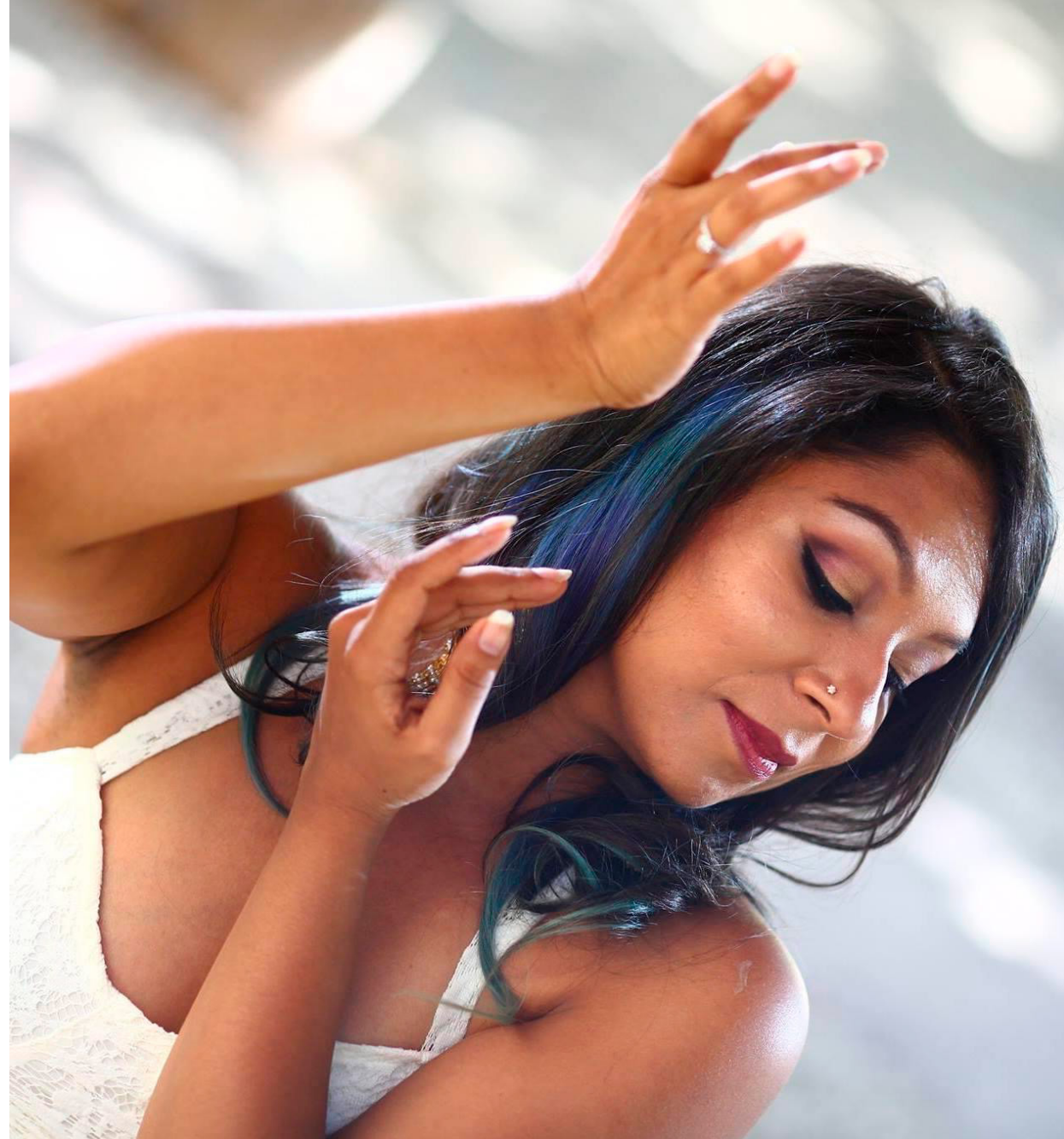
in G Minor BWV 1001” (performed by Refiloe Olifant, a violinist from the Free State, close to Kimberley); “Step Truth” a pulsating song composed by Durban-based artist Njabulile Nzuza (who performs under the name Oudskul Omello); and “Omoya” (“those of spirit” in isiZulu), a soothing, acoustic song by Thobekile Mbandla (whose stage name is Ntomb'Yelanga, “daughter of the sun” in isiZulu). This selection reflects the multisonic soundscape of my journey.

The film, as the title suggests, reflects the idea of journeying and writing self. The long journey between desert-like Kimberley and tropical Durban, poverty and possibility, is one I have done many times. Back and forth, I have moved between learning and unlearning.

OFFERING

The process of making this film has allowed me to think deeply about how I view my own personal history and begin to resolve my own demons. By excavating my own story as practice and research, I consider what it means to connect history-making in the present to what our future selves might refer to and build on, knowing what we know. I hope in creating this work I have created a space for others to begin to consider how they might be writing, speaking, or dancing themselves into history in the now moment.

THOBILE JANE MAPHANGA is a Durban based dance practitioner, creative collaborator, and emerging writer whose current preoccupation is with Black female narratives and how Black women are writing themselves into history in the now. Through her research, which is theory and practice led, she explores where and how Black women use their voices and where these voices can be found. Through self-study she journeys to find her authentic voice and learn her true self through processes of questioning and unlearning. Her research methods include, but are not limited to, sitting in wait, listening, and improvisation.



TRACING roots

A Perspective on Indian Contemporary Dance

BY ISHIKA SETH

I **CAME TO THE US** from India in 2003 to attain my BA in Dance from San Jose State University. Hoping to pursue a career in dance in the US, I approached Mona Khan Company, a Bollywood Dance company, upon graduation for teaching opportunities. I had never studied Bollywood Dance but the familiarity of the music and the culture

drew me to it. After teaching, performing, and choreographing with the company for several years, I went on to become the Assistant Artistic Director and continued in that position for over a decade. Now, as I restart my journey as an independent artist, I am trying to articulate what my style of Indian Contemporary Dance looks like by tracing

its roots and looking at it in relation to other Indian Contemporary artists.

When I was a child, I held a piece of dance history in my hands—my grandmother’s diary from her time at the Uday Shankar Dance Center in Almora, a town in the state of Uttarakhand, India. My grandmother attended “The Center” as she called it in 1945. I grew up listening to her stories about Shankar, looking through photographs of her in various costumes and of Shankar in rehearsal with his dance troupe. I vividly remember her talking about a piece based on machinery; in my imagination the work consisted of bodies forming enormous structures and moving parts in physically impossible ways.

Uday Shankar pioneered an idiom of movement in the 1930s that he called Creative Dance. It was devised from different dance forms including Indian classical and folk dance forms, like Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, and Manipuri, and Western forms like ballet and expressionist dance. Shankar was the brother of the famous sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar, who danced in his brother’s dance troupe for a few years before he began his study of music. Inspired by painting, sculpture, music, poetry, photography, and theater, Uday brought together various aesthetic sensibilities from the East and the West, collaborating with artists, including the ballerina Anna Pavlova. Despite or perhaps because of the fact that Uday was not formally trained in any particular dance form, he is widely recognized as the father of Indian Contemporary Dance.

My own dance training mirrors the eclecticism of Shankar’s choreographic practice. It began during my childhood in India where I spent time practicing yoga with my grandmother, learning dances for weddings and cultural events, and dabbling in different classical and folk dance forms, including Bharatanatyam, Odissi, and Bihu.

My formal dance training began with Jazz with Ashley Lobo at The Danceworx in New Delhi, during my college years. I was drawn to the staccato movements, leg extensions, pop music, and discipline required of the form.

After four years of Jazz training, I went to study Indian Contemporary Dance with Santosh Nair who had been a part of Narendra Sharma’s modern Indian dance company. Sharma himself had originally been part of Shankar’s dance troupe. Nair’s background was in Kathakali and Mayurbhanj Chauu, a dance form that incorporates elements of martial arts and movements inspired by nature and daily life. For instance, there are movements informed by the parting of hair, applying a tika to the forehead, and washing dishes, as well as the movements of water and the walk of a stork. It is a powerful dance form: the basic posture is a deep pli  -like position called chauk.

With Nair, I had to find a sort of fluidity in my torso and a more grounded posture that was in contrast to my Jazz training. His choreography drew heavily on Mayurbhanj Chhau, consisting of asymmetrical postures, held balances, and quick floor work, and demanding a certain athleticism. His choreography developed organically through improvisation and movement tasks assigned to the dancers, and explored abstract themes as well as Hindu mythological stories.

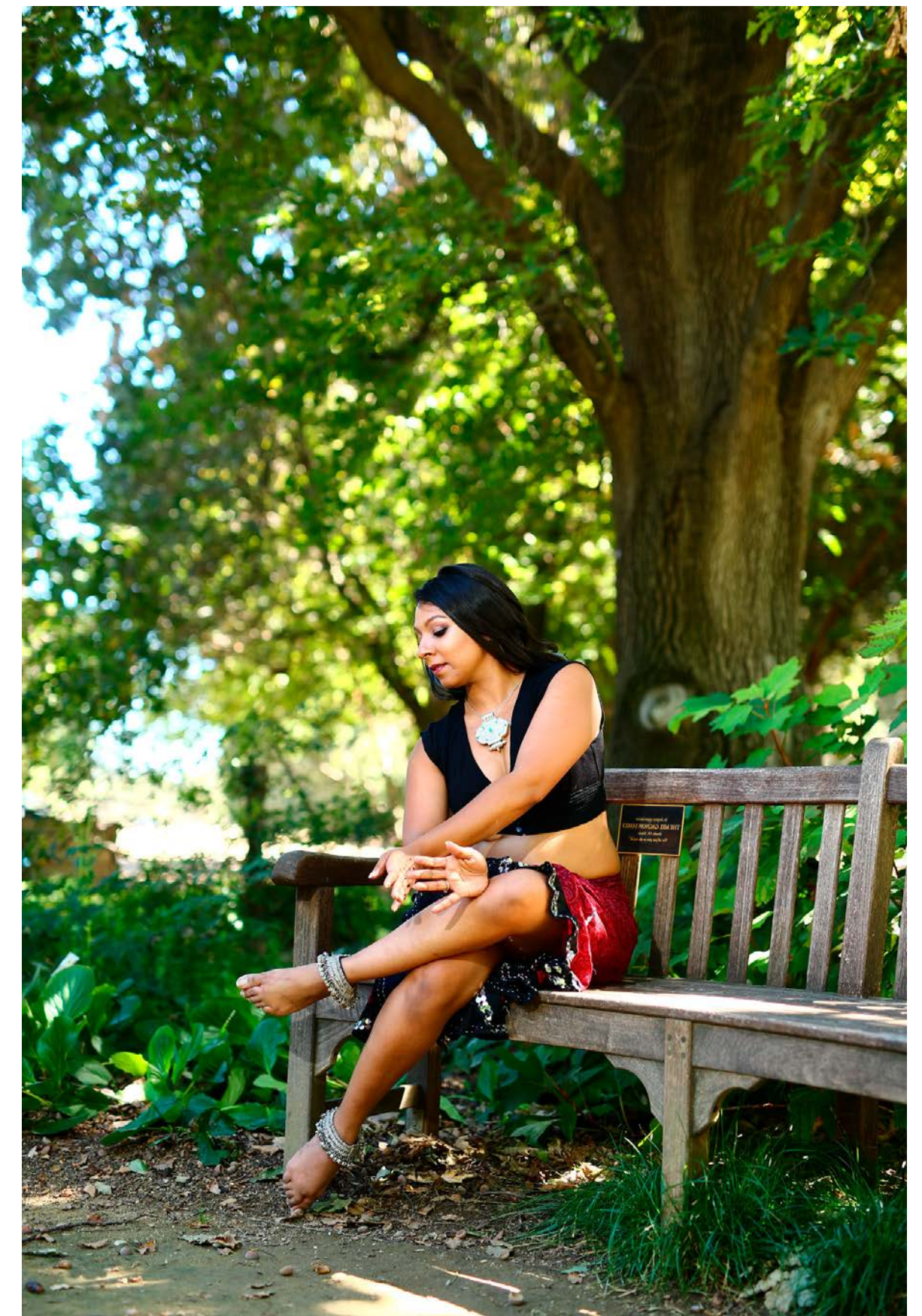
I hoped to perform with Nair’s company, but the gender gap seemed an obstacle. The company was male-dominated, and the men, who were deeply trained in Mayurbhanj Chhau, had a better grasp of Nair’s style and were thereby given featured roles. As a woman, my roles were limited; I recall handing the men their swords while they performed a dynamic Chhau segment in one particular work. I craved an all-women work with the sort of dynamic choreography Nair choreographed for the men. I also wanted more stage time.

When I approached Nair about it, he said I would have to learn Chhau.

So I started training in Mayurbhanj Chhau with his guru, Guru J.J. Sai Babu at the Natya Ballet Centre in New Delhi, where I also began to study Kathak with Guru Geetanjali Lal. Unlike Chhau, Kathak has a very upright posture with intricate wrist movements, fast rhythmic footwork as well as chakkars where one turns on the heel of the foot. I did get to assist in the creation of an all-women work soon after. In the meantime, I applied to study in the US to deepen

my training and knowledge of modern and contemporary dance forms.

In India, I had completed my Bachelor’s in English Literature, and came to SJSU for a second Bachelor’s in Dance. At SJSU, I studied Modern, Jazz, and Ballet. My years at SJSU were extremely challenging because almost everyone had grown up taking classes in these forms, whereas I hadn’t taken my first Jazz class until the age of seventeen. I was often discouraged by the gap between me and my peers when it came to technique but when it came to choreography,



PHOTOS BY ROB FATKE (ZOART PHOTOGRAPHY)

I was in my element. Learning how to craft choreographic works, how to manipulate time, space, and energy, was life-changing. To this day, I draw from the notes from my choreography classes with Fred Mathews.

As an Indian immigrant with both formal and informal training in diverse dance forms, I have developed an Indian Contemporary choreographic practice that references various dance styles based on the concept of the work. Sometimes I make a conscious choice to dissect form, adding petit allegro footwork from

interested in abstraction and more in excavating stories from my life, experiences, culture, and engaging with social and political issues.

For dancers who practice South Asian Classical Dance forms, just stretching the boundaries of a particular form can push it into the realm of contemporary. But to an audience only vaguely familiar with, say, Bharatanatyam, it may still resemble Bharatanatyam; they may not see the nuanced changes, the deliberate bending of form, the subtle breaking from tradition. The practitioner, however,

TRADITIONALISTS OFTEN BECOME cultural gatekeepers who don't want to see these dance forms diluted or used in settings that they deem inappropriate.

ballet to Kathak hand gestures, for example. But mostly, the release and flow of contemporary, hand gestures of Kathak, the expressiveness and lyricism of Bollywood, narrative structure of Indian Classical dance, contractions and swings from modern dance, vocabulary from Mayurbhanj Chhau, and most recently, elements of waack emerge together on their own.

In addition to drawing from the multiple techniques I've studied, my version of Indian Contemporary Dance relies heavily on storytelling. Storytelling is an intrinsic part of South Asian culture, and for me, it is the act of storytelling rather than the traditional stories themselves that influence the form. Initially, after graduating from SJSU, my works were more abstract and modern. But a decade of dancing with Mona Khan Company added a lyrical element to my choreography. Even in Bollywood, the lyrical interpretation originates from Classical dance forms where the mudras (hand gestures) are deeply meaningful and can be very specific, like depicting a tree, or a bow and arrow. Now, most of my works evoke a theme or idea, and I am less

may identify as an Indian Contemporary artist because they are deliberately dissecting the form or using traditional movement to explore contemporary themes. For example, Nava Dance Theater uses Bharatanatyam to explore contemporary themes such as the MeToo movement. Even though the movement draws from Nava artistic director Nadhi Thakkek's training in Bharatanatyam, training her dancers share, the themes are contemporary. New York-based artist Amita Batra defines herself as a storytelling artist who draws inspiration from the ideologies and techniques of various dance styles, most prominently modern, contemporary, and kathak. And Amit Patel, a Bay Area artist, blends Indian and Western dance forms to break gender stereotypes and explore his identity as a first-generation American and Queer Desi. Further, the diversity of South Asian classical and folk dance forms further complicates any effort to define an Indian Contemporary aesthetic. An Indian Contemporary dancer with an Odissi background looks different from someone with Kathak training, or another who primarily practices Garba.

Even though many artists are drawn to Indian Contemporary because it allows room for individual expression, those coming from classical dance backgrounds often face derision. There is this underlying anxiety about the dilution of Classical dance forms when they step into the contemporary space. Some believe that the purity of the Classical form has to be preserved while others are less concerned with preservation and more interested in artistic evolution. Traditionalists often become cultural gatekeepers who don't want to see these dance forms diluted or used in settings that they deem inappropriate.

Indian Contemporary is an idiom that acknowledges but is not bound by tradition. My style is born of a collision of tradition and innovation, one that reflects my reality as an immigrant, Indian woman. It provides a way of creating that enables me to be true to who I am. I believe that a dance form is not more sacrosanct than the artists who embody it. Indian Contemporary helps me to acknowledge my childhood learning while articulating the importance of formal training. The body memories of these different forms enable me to create in a richer way than if I were to chase the elusive purity of a single form. It is also an act of resistance to value cultural and folk dance forms rather than seeing them as less than Indian Classical and Euro-centric dance forms. Indian Contemporary dance is a living, breathing, ever-changing, and evolving form, so my idea of it keeps evolving as well. Ultimately, I choose my own voice, messy with overlapping textures, a disarray of roots but with endless possibilities to explore.

ISHIKA SETH (she/her) is a South Asian choreographer, dancer, dance educator, immigrant, storyteller & mom based in the Bay Area. She was the Assistant Artistic Director of the Mona Khan Company from 2011-21. Since 2007, Ishika has presented her work at various venues in & around the Bay Area and also self-produced shows at NOHSpace & CounterPULSE in collaboration with other artists.

10 IN

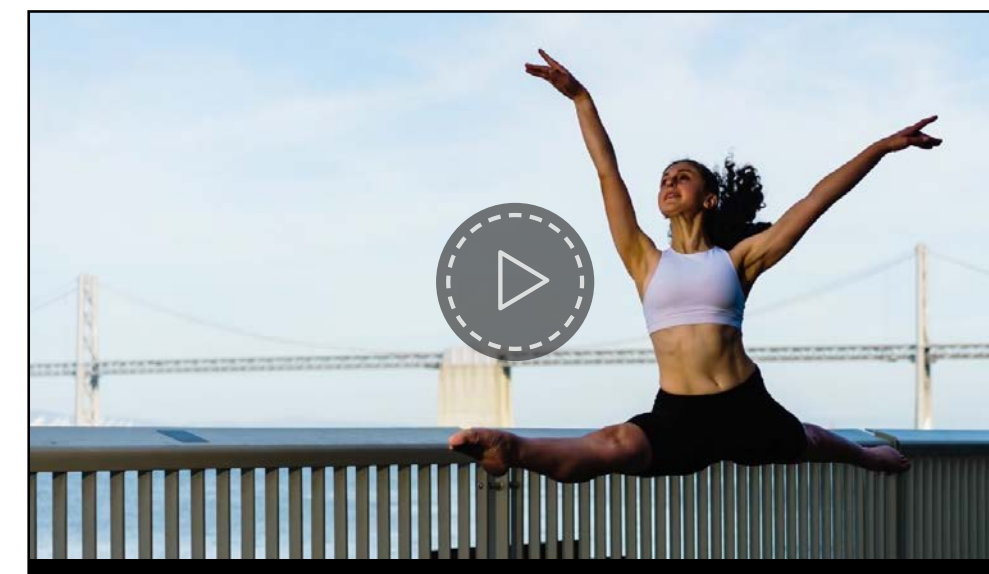
WITH ANDRÉA SPEARMAN

Quick insights with the local Bay Area Dance Community

Prior to Covid, I had often thought of producing a “(wo)man on the street”-style series where I would chat up dancers and dance supporters outside of classes, performances, auditions, studios, etc.

Since last year that idea has shifted and manifested itself into a 10 minute Zoom interview where we gave absolutely no heads up about potential questions to the interviewees. Ha! They only knew they'd be asked about their dance background and current artistry. And I did ask them to show us their favorite dance move. Enjoy!

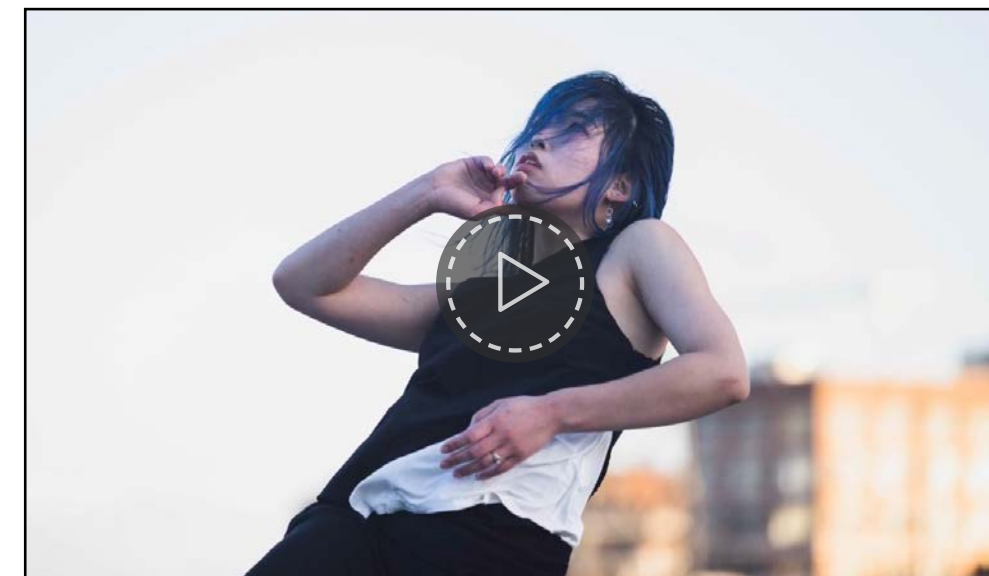
10 QUESTIONS in 10 MINUTES



Alyssa Mitchel



Jessica Recinos



Sawako Gannon

BY JULIA DAVIDSON

DANCING HAPPENS IN STRIP MALLS TOO



STRIP MALL DANCE STUDIO. STRIP. MALL. DANCE. STUDIO.

I just got home from my teaching job at a Strip Mall Dance Studio. I love teaching at the Strip Mall Dance Studio. Strip Mall Dance Studio occupies a special space in my inner landscape. Today, as I drove home from teaching, I got something not unlike a lump in my throat, but lower. Like the space behind my heart finally opened its little mouth and said, “ahhh...” or “aww...” I love the Strip Mall Dance Studio.

My first memories of learning dance were at the Strip Mall Dance Studio near my house in Lawrence, Kansas. The strip mall was creatively named “The Malls Shopping Center.” I don’t remember what the studio itself was called but I know exactly where it was—tucked in the corner of a row of single-story beige buildings that also housed Pet World (my favorite place on earth as a 4-year-old), an Ace Hardware (my second favorite place), and a Godfather’s Pizza.

The Strip Mall Dance Studio of my childhood was a tiny room within a room that had a window through which children’s grown-ups watched classes. If I go back through my

spatial dance lineage, I can vaguely remember other studios’ internal spaces—the marley, the fluorescent lighting, the smell of rubber and magic—but I struggle to place them. But my Strip Mall Dance Studio? Firmly lodged in my memory. So too the dances I did there; I remember almost all of the steps to my first and only tap number, marching in lock-step with other children to “Spoonful of Sugar.”

Fast-forward through time and space to the Strip Mall Dance Studio where I teach today. It too stands among single-story beige buildings, occupying a former Hallmark store between an Arrow Hardware (the

shadow of the word “Ace” visible on the storefront) and a Carbone’s Pizza. It used to be NEXT to the Hallmark building, in a space half the size of its current footprint. THAT space had a curtain dividing the studio. The battle every Thursday was to see if I could play my music louder than the other teacher, and also shout over the music, and also not have a kid chrysalis inside the curtain while trying to teach them that they are artists and their art matters, and, fuck it, let’s just play duck duck goose, I’m tired.

The people who come to this Strip Mall Dance Studio are from an upper Midwest town of roughly 20,000. When the studio moved to its larger

strip mall space, one of the studio parents created the new floor plan on AutoCAD. The sprung floor was another parent's doing; after lots of research, they discovered you could install pool noodles to create the spring. There is a bin of mismatched ballet shoes, tap shoes, and jazz shoes held together in pairs with stretched out rubber bands for dancers who forgot their footwear. There is a miniature altar with a picture and pair of slippers for one of the parents who passed away early last year. Small performances are held for the hospital and nursing homes every spring. This place has love in its bones.

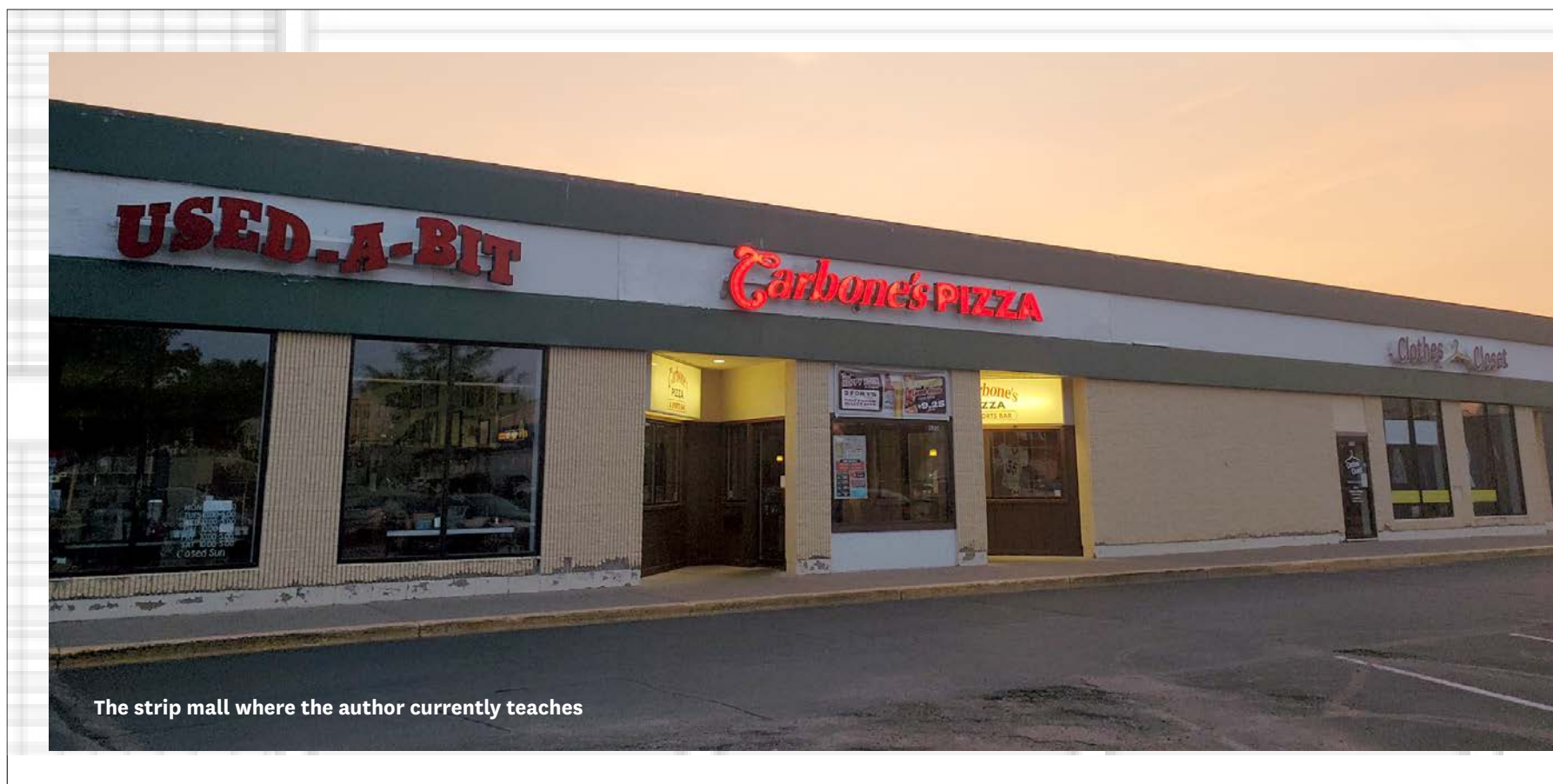
But I didn't always know I was allowed to love the Strip Mall Dance Studio.

Strip Mall Dance Studios have long stood at the periphery of my mental schema of Successful Dance Education, where Those Who Can't Do go to Teach because they can't Hack It at Real Dancing.

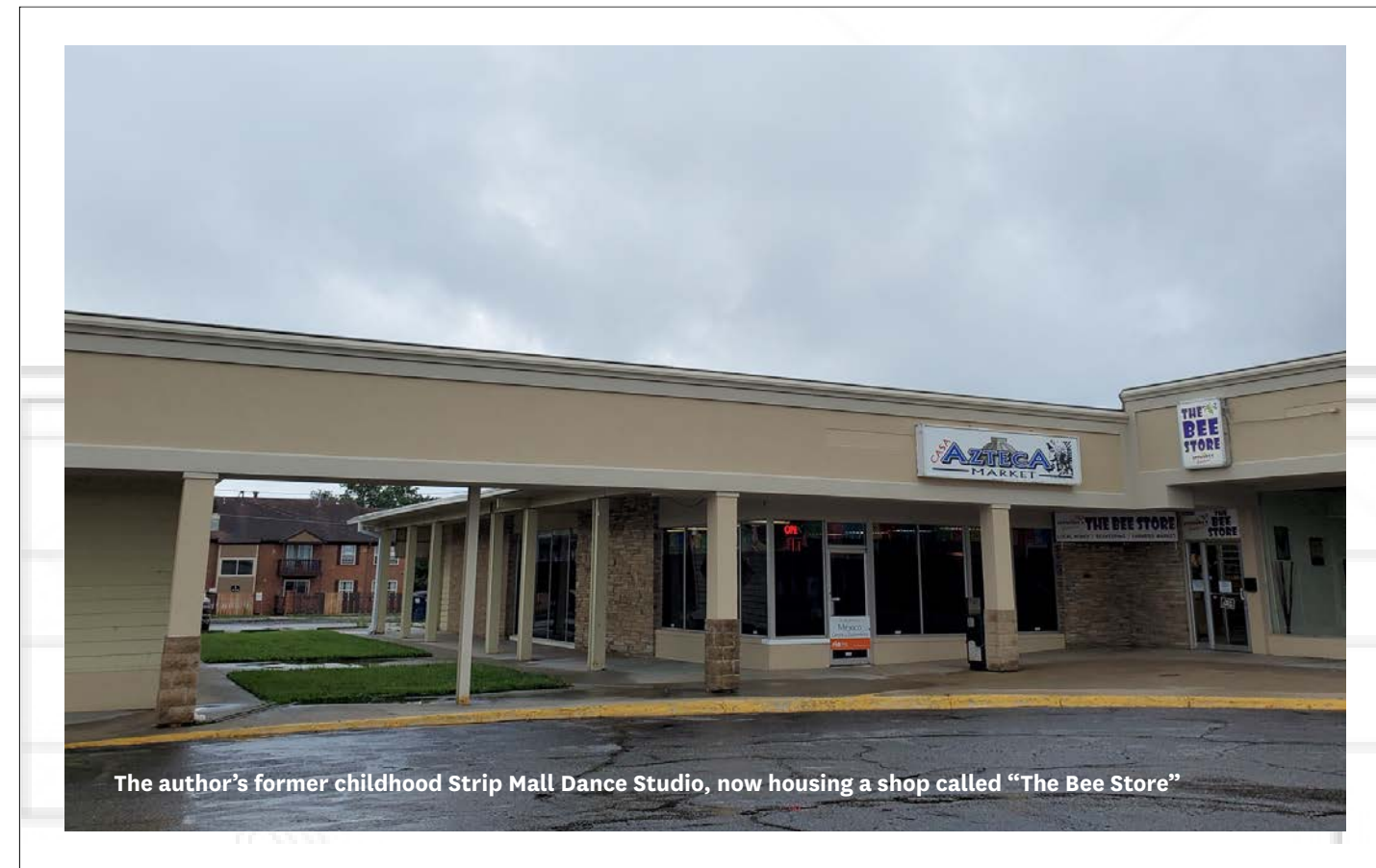
Real Dancing is always happening elsewhere—at sleek Big Name Company Dance Studio or edgy Movement Complexes (gawd knows I have some movement complexes). Even raw, unpretentious spaces such as the local Community Center or Church Basement contain Real Dancing.



Julia Davidson



The strip mall where the author currently teaches



The author's former childhood Strip Mall Dance Studio, now housing a shop called "The Bee Store"

Strip Mall Dance Studios don't contain Real Dancing. They are single-story shopping centers, where Buying Things and Doing Capitalism happens.

Real Dancing privileges process. And processing. And not knowing. And inventing new languages for all the processing. Modes. Practices. Embodiments. Phases of self. Real Dancing relishes the goo stage between caterpillar and butterfly. And Real Dancing bemoans the need for money to help ensure the goo stage is able to pay rent and buy groceries this week.

The Strip Mall Dance Studio I've danced in and the Strip Mall Dance Studio where I teach know themselves as businesses that rely heavily on costumed end-of-year performances to make ends meet. There is clarity in what goes on (performance) and why (our bottom line and financial survival) that needs little explanation or re-language-ing. Instead of modes, practices, and embodiments, we have The Death of Dance as an Art; Product Over Process; Over-involved Parents and Dead-Eyed Children soul-lessly performing their millionth tap piece to "Good Ship Lollipop." The Strip Mall Dance Studio doesn't gel with my sense of what

dance education and dance community should look like.

But that's not all the Strip Mall Dance Studio is. Turns out, the shit I judge is also the shit I love.

I love the parents who run the front desk, create schedules, costume the performances, dance, and teach classes. I love their group text, a web of outdated Winnie-the-Pooh memes and "you make it home alright?" messages.

I love that the kids get so hyped about learning their end-of-the-year dance that they beg to share it with the other classes before the damn thing is even done. I love that they love learning choreography and repeating it. Again. And again. And Again.

I love seeing how much the students crave being in the space together, becoming inseparable like a pair of necklaces in a pocket.

I love that my Strip Mall Dance Studio is bringing forward dance forms from Black lineages and movement traditions that I don't have a strong history with, like tap and jazz, and along with them, through slow but steady conversation, awareness around HOW these forms are taught and BY whom and in WHAT relation to other forms, thus slowly shifting the needle on how dance is understood by this community

of young people. I love that we are transposing new conversations about studio culture and racial equity onto gatherings replete with unironic wine-mom humor. And wine. I love our clunky unlearning and growth.

And I love that I'm welcomed in, allowed to have my creative movement, roll on the floor, expand-contract, feely-feely improvisation happening right next to dance-along songs that, frankly, the kids seem to like better.

We (y'all/us who treat dance as more than just a hobby) know Real Dancing happens everywhere. We know it with the fervor that accompanies everyone and their dog making dance videos, adding dance as the special sauce to their art because, "hey, I can move so I can dance." We know it because of how discoverable dance STILL seems to be (did you see this kid? Did you see this vid? Did you know that obscure people in obscure places ALSO move their bodies?) We also know that Real Dancing, or at least the definitions of it that have set up shop in my head, often require and hide a lot of work, money, and credentials—prerequisites to belonging that still persistently go unaddressed in many of my circles despite the ways in which other

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIA DAVIDSON

"Turns out, the shit I judge is also the shit I love."

barriers such as gender, ability, race, class, size, age, and neurodivergence are more actively addressed.

Strip Mall Dance Studios remind me that Real Dancing continues to happen in places where a part of me still thinks Real Dancing doesn't happen.

Dancing happens in repetition. It happens in dance-along songs (#teamLaurieBerkner). It happens in places with inspirational quotes on the walls. It happens in places that emphasize performance over process and places where people get excited about costumes.

I was talking with the studio owner—a friend, a chosen mom to many, and a teacher in the dance department at one of the two colleges in town—about her dance lineage. She did a modern dance head swirl shoulder roll arm extension thing and said that that is how she always starts her modern warm-up. A coworker did the same gesture, and said, "Yep, we know that's how modern starts." The studio owner

said that this gesture-phrase had come from her mentor. I wonder, How many bodies have walked into the Strip Mall Dance Studio, learned that same phrase and felt comfort, not just in the phrase's mechanical yumminess but in its ubiquity, in how known it is, not in how original or virtuosic?

The Strip Mall Dance Studio is a home and the dancing that happens there, like the strip mall itself, might feel unremarkable in a sea of other strip malls. But when it comes to movement lineage, throughlines are like collective heartstrings, felt by the group and passed between bodies. The Strip Mall Dance Studio is a base, roots, and a culture inclusive of showstopper finales and bedazzled tutus. It is a beloved place for a community of kids to return to again and again, learning the same warm-ups and hello songs that the older students know, that the teachers taught them, that their teachers taught them. It is a place tucked between a hardware store and a pizza place, where I teach Real Dancing every week. And it is one of my favorite places on earth.

JULIA DAVIDSON is a dancer, teacher, writer and arts administrator based in Minneapolis, MN. She received her B.A. in Performance Studies from Macalester College and M.A. in Dance from Mills College.

The Women in White

by EMMA GARBER

A YOUNG WOMAN IS KIDNAPPED and tortured. When a man promises to save her, he falls through on his word. She kills herself, realizing she would be happier in death than she is in life.

A YOUNG WOMAN LEARNS she is in a relationship with a married man. Publicly humiliated, she is called crazy and dies amidst her betrayal and shame.

A MAN LEAVES HIS FIANCÉ to pursue his fantasy woman. Unable to tame her, he wraps her in straitjacket-like silks, killing her instantly.

A TEMPLE DANCER IS CAUGHT amidst conspiracy and scandal when her lover agrees to marry another woman. After their infidelities are revealed, those in power first shame and then murder the young dancer.

These are the four most popular librettos in the classical ballet repertoire. *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *La Sylphide*, and *La Bayadere* are collectively referred to as the “White Ballets” after their second acts, where the corps de ballet appear in all white. Each ballet is over a hundred years old, but every major ballet company in the world continues to perform them, often without revisions. They are pillars of

the classical ballet repertoire; ballet masters, choreographers, and directors scoff at the mere suggestion of tampering with the classics. If the ballet world loves anything, it’s tradition.

Like many young girls, I was seduced by the fairytale escapism that classical ballet promised me. My walls were adorned with paintings of tutu-clad dancers and signed pointe shoes. I watched performances of each

ballet on repeat, memorizing the steps and score as if they were song lyrics. Later in my training I would perform excerpts and variations from the White Ballets. Donning layers of white tulle and rib-shackling corsets, I stood in militaristic-like ranks of swans, shades, and willis.

It was not until my first year of college that I asked myself why women were always dying in classical ballets.

Now entering my senior year, this question still haunts me.

Truth be told, the female protagonists in my favorite ballets weren’t exactly women. They were swans and sylphs. Ghosts. Hallucinations. Fairies. Woodland creatures. Just woman enough to feel the pain of their misfortunes, yet fantastical enough to dance through it. They were chaste visions in bridal white. Men fell in love with them upon



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA GARBER

Though these ballets are framed as tragic romances, they are also not-so-subtle glorifications of white femininity. They are celebrations of heteronormative, cisgendered, Eurocentric norms, designed to bar anyone who doesn't fit into the perfectly crafted mold from dancing.



first glance. Their lives? Easily disposable. At best, they were granted the common courtesy of symbolizing eternal love: their suffering a metaphor for grace and forgiveness. They could pirouette and jete with ease, but never yell or stand firmly on two feet. They drowned in lakes of their own tears and danced to their graves, pointing their feet even in the afterlife.

These are stories of women suffering, usually at the hands of men; stories of women being shamed, harassed, exploited, and killed. I won't argue that we shouldn't be telling these stories. On the contrary, in a post-#MeToo society these stories have never been more necessary. The problem lies in how the ballet community continues to tell them.

These stories are always framed around the male protagonist, always told from their point of view. Despite the centrality of Odette's suffering to the plot of *Swan Lake*, it is Prince Siegfried who appears in all four acts, his perspective driving the narration. Giselle's death is a mere precursor to Albrecht's realization that he will have to live without her. *La Bayadere* and *La Sylphide* are no different. These may be stories of women suffering, but the real tragedy is always the man's grief.

And these are stories of white women suffering. Though these ballets are framed as tragic romances, they are also not-so-subtle glorifications of white femininity. They are celebrations of heteronormative, cisgendered, Eurocentric norms, designed to bar anyone who doesn't fit into the perfectly crafted mold from dancing.

Ballet's gatekeepers will justify all of this for the sake of tradition. The classical repertoire is sacred, we must keep it pure at all costs, must protect the aesthetic and never question our ancestors. This is ironic, considering the Bournonville and Petipa choreography that the ballet world has desperately clung to in the last century is itself a revision of previous versions.

The original 1836 version of *La Sylphide* has been long lost. Though *Giselle* was first choreographed in 1841 Paris, today we perform the Russian choreography from 1884. *Swan Lake*, arguably the most iconic ballet in the modern canon, failed upon its initial premier. The 1895 revival, which has survived untouched until today, made major revisions to the plot, score, and choreography.¹

So the ballet "greats," or rather, the white men who created these ballets—Petipa, Bournonville, Ivanov—were already working with revisions. Choreographers today need not feel beholden to any particular version--there's no pure form.

Truth be told, it shouldn't be so daunting to touch these works, but because the ballet community puts them on such a high pedestal, it feels as such. There are those who have dared to touch the classics. Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*, which features a nearly all male cast, is itself now a modern classic. Dada Masilo's *Giselle* integrates South African dances and reimagines an ending where Giselle refuses to forgive Albrecht, leaving him to die. Shobana Jeyasingh explores the origins of orientalism and exoticism in her ballet, *Bayadere—The Ninth Life*. Others—Akram Khan, Alexander Ekman, Seeta Patel—have produced their own re-imaginings.

For ballet to survive, this work must continue. Still, I would argue that there is room in the ballet repertoire for new librettos. Reimagining the classics is great, but it's time the ballet community creates a space for the stories that have yet to be told. It's time that women—including Black women, queer women, and trans women—tell their own stories on the ballet stage. We can tell stories of women suffering. We can tell stories of betrayal, shame, and pain. Yes, we can even tell simple love stories. But to do these stories justice, we must strip them of the white male gaze that has haunted the ballet canon for centuries.

But what is to become of the classical repertoire? Is there any possibility of salvaging the original ballets? Is it enough to host post-show conversations or provide program notes, acknowledging the weight these works carry? Should ballet companies perform them in a purely historical context, or remove any plot from the choreography? Is it time we dancers retire our tutus, pack up the tulle and feathers, and abandon the White Ballets once and for all?

I believe the future of these ballets is complicated, and these answers will take time. Although they are a deeply flawed tradition, these ballets are also deeply loved. The first time I danced the second act of *Swan Lake*, I remember hugging my fellow corps dancers in the wings, tears streaming down our faces. Overwhelmed with emotion, one girl turned to me and said, "Think about all of the dancers who have danced these steps before us. We're joining a part of something so much bigger than any one of us."

For many dancers, performing these ballets is not only an artistic release, but an empowering display of their power and strength, a testament to the comradery felt between dancers, and a chance to take agency in their training. Ballet is a paradox, for as valid as these feelings may be, there is clear tension between this kinesthetic experience and the narratives that continuously disempower women.

We have not seen the end of the White Ballets. Having already survived centuries, dancers will continue to pass down the steps and score, and audiences will continue to fill theaters, eager to see the women in white. And while the steps on stage remain unchanged, the world outside will continue to rapidly evolve. The ballet community must realize that their art does not exist in a vacuum. Though tradition is incredibly sacred to the art, eventually our dances must reflect the world around us.

PHOTOS BY NEIL MANCINI



Recently, the four-year-old girl I teach ballet to asked me to teach her the "swan dance" she had seen illustrations of in a picture book. I demonstrated raising my arms above my head, bringing my wrists together, palms facing outwards, then letting my arms float down once more. There we stood, facing each other, performing the iconic choreography and I wondered where this art form would take us, and where we would take it.

EMMA GARBER is an arts writer and dance artist. Born and raised in Needham, MA, Garber is in her fourth year at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She will graduate in 2022 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance, a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and a certificate in Arts Management. Garber is the Head Opinion and Editorial editor of the *Massachusetts Daily Collegian*. She has been published in the *UMass Magazine*, the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and the *Amherst Indy* and quoted in *Psyche Magazine* and on WGBH radio. Garber has danced nearly her entire life, with a special focus on ballet.

¹ Homans, Jennifer. *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*. Random House, 2010.



PHOTO BY ROCINA PRADO

MY ROOTS OF MOVEMENT

NAVIGATING A CAREER in a Eurocentric, White-centralizing, contemporary dance world as a lesbian Latinx woman of mixed Indigenous blood never felt complicated until it started to. Before my exploration into non-Eurocentric dance, I operated through a lens shaped by my Western dance education, a profound education, but one that only allowed me to envision a very limited contemporary dance career. It wasn't until I began to practice non-Western dance and trace my Indigenous ancestral lineage that was lost due to colonization that I found that lens no longer served me.

As I dissect my Western dance training, I am left with more questions than answers. Why was there such a lack of cultural and Indigenous dance studies throughout my dance education? Would I have sought my ancestral lineage sooner had a door been open to me in my dance schooling? Why is it my job, as an individual and person of color, to find my own way out of this limited, dance culture? I continue to find myself maneuvering through this unlearning and relearning process, a rewarding process that has also revealed the ways that, throughout my dance education, White Eurocentric Westernized dance was normalized as the standard and the forms of dance outside of this standard were considered "other."

I chose to pursue my BFA in Dance and Choreography at Calarts where we would touch on these "other" dance forms in our dance history class. But the majority of the Calarts curriculum was spent studying choreographers

like Isadora Duncan, Merce Cunningham, Mark Morris, and Pina Bausch. These pioneers of modern dance were given extensive class time with hours' worth of films, articles, books, and discussions. I studied the essentials of a broad modern dance repertoire with techniques that included Limón, Release, Horton, and Graham. At the time, I was blind to the erasure of cultural and Indigenous dance in our dance curriculum. Naturally, I left Calarts wanting to fulfill a dance agenda that reflected this dance discipline created through and by White individuals. Upon graduation, my peers and I were encouraged to push the boundaries of dance and create thought provoking work, but only within a construct built around Eurocentric dance.

This construct would prevent me from finding my own ancestral dance lineage for years to come. I spent the majority of my dance career creating a subconscious

dance hierarchy with ballet and contemporary ranked at the very top. It was when I began to open myself up to the dances of Samba, Hip Hop, Vogue, House, and many other cultural dance styles and learn their histories that I began to decolonize my experiences with Western dance, challenging this hierarchy.

For example, when I began to study Samba, I was first drawn to it for its gorgeous costumes and boisterous percussion music. As my relationship to the form and its communities deepened, I began to see and feel how deeply symbolic and ceremonial Samba was for the people of Brazil. Samba originates from African peoples who were brought to Brazil to work on the sugarcane plantations. It is a dance of celebration. Once slavery ended, Samba dancers migrated to the favelas, also known as the shan-

STUDYING CULTURAL DANCE IS A PRACTICE OF DECOLONIZATION THAT INSPIRES ME TO DISCOVER THE ROOTS OF MY ANCESTRAL DANCE LINEAGES.

tytowns, outside of the city where these formerly enslaved individuals would put together dance troupes for Carnival. These loud, unrestrained performances were at first frowned upon by Brazil's Portuguese "upper class." Over time the music and dance deeply affected the hearts and souls of all the people of Brazil, crossing classes and borders. Learning this history of Samba allowed me to deepen my respect and love for the dance and gave me a profound appreciation for its origins and ancestry. You can feel the pride and joy that resonate throughout the Samba community, and all who are invited into it, through the care each individual takes into telling Samba's story.

The other cultural dance forms I have practiced share similar backstories and ancestry as Samba. Hip Hop was birthed in New York in the 70s by rhythmically talented individuals and was shared amongst communities of culture that didn't have access to Western dance academies. Vogue dance evolved out of the Harlem ballroom scene of the 1960s, a dance and performance scene created by individuals from the LGBTQ community where they were safe to express their true, authentic selves. House dance was influenced by African dance, Tap, Latin dance, and martial arts, and is a dance about freedom, improvisation, and feeling the rhythm of the music. These styles of dance were born of struggle and fought to be established as legitimate dance genres. Their histories deepened my engagement with dance, both physically and spiritually. I feel that as a dancer who has been privileged to study such a vast assortment of dance styles, I have a responsibility to share

their histories along with their movements, spreading respect, love, and understanding of their origins.

The knowledge that I have gained expanding my cultural dance repertoire has helped me peel away the parts of my Eurocentric dance training that I never questioned. Studying cultural dance is a practice of decolonization that inspires me to discover the roots of my ancestral dance lineages. My lineage is traced to the nomadic Chichimeca tribes from the Aguascalientes region in Mexico and the Mayans in the Yucatan, and I continue to try and find ways to translate this information into my dance. The research I have gathered has informed me that my ancestors were fierce warriors, described by the Spanish as the most ferocious, the most valiant, and the most elusive of peoples. They were also fierce adorers of mother earth, known as people of the wind. When I apply these bits of precious information to my dance, I am grounded.

I have reached out to dance groups like Calpulli Tonalehqueh in San Jose, and Xitlalli and Mix-coatl in San Francisco, for guidance on how to even begin my journey in Aztec danza. After a 48-minute conversation with one of the elders of

the group Xitlalli, I felt overwhelmed. The amount of history that was shared with me, the ceremonies, the prayers, the language with its sharp T's and L's with clicks of the tongue, left me feeling lost to an ancestry and culture that was historically mine to claim but absent from my upbringing. Parts of me felt so ashamed of how foreign it all was to me. I realized that this reclaiming process would be both joyous and painful. Joining one of these groups is a commitment to a lifestyle change, a complete baptism in the culture of my ancestors. I'm deeply committed to this journey into my past.

Knowing my history has changed my approach to movement, making me conscious of the decisions I make in my dance career in ways that I never was before. Today, inspired by the movements of the many cultural dances I have practiced, and those of my own ancestry, I continue to search for ways that I can put the pieces of my story into my present dance life so that they can feed me and my loved ones now and in the future.

BIANCA STEPHANIE MENDOZA was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area where she began her training in classical ballet with Principal dancers of the San Francisco Ballet; Carmela Zegarelli Peter and Zoltan Peter. She was accepted into the BFA dance program at the California Institute of the Arts which was proclaimed the United States number one art school in 2012. Now Bianca is the artistic director, creator and choreographer of her very own dance company entitled Binki Danz founded in 2013 which focuses on political, economic, racial, and gender subjects. Bianca is currently dancing and choreographing at Dance Mission Theater and with Krissy Keefer's Dance Brigade Company. Bianca is a Latinx American feminist, choreographer, dancer, artist, and activist.



Klandanda Dance Theater in Performing Diaspora (2021). Photo by Robbie Sweeney.



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Beyond Aesthetics

Bachata, Politics, Praxis

By Chiara Giovanni

In the summer of 2020, when the murder of George Floyd sparked nationwide demonstrations and precipitated waves of change in every area of American public life, the dance world was no exception. The diverse Latin dance industry (which I here understand as the community of promoters, organizers, instructors, students, competitors, performers, choreographers, and DJs working with dance forms like salsa, merengue, bachata, kizomba, zouk, and more) was forced to come to terms with legacies of erasure and appropriation of the African/Afro-Latinx roots of many popular dance styles. Professional dancers within this community strove to recognize the seismic impact of the Black Lives Matter movement in their own ways, joining [Blackout Tuesday](#), hosting fundraising events, dedicating choreography routines to [Black ancestors](#), and [calling](#) upon each other on social media to recognize the inequities in their industry. Yet, after the dust settles and the protests dissipate, what are we left with? Which changes endure, and which are simply aesthetic nods to politically charged moments in history?

Following the initial displays of unity and fiery conviction on the part of many influential names in the U.S. Latin dance world, the past year has seen dancers, studios, and event promoters attempt, to varying degrees of success, to integrate their stated political commitments to anti-racism into their movement praxis. For many, this has taken the form of encouraging other dancers to explicitly acknowledge the Black influence on popular Latin dance forms like salsa, bachata, and merengue. [Areito Arts](#), already industry leaders in educating dancers about the African and Indigenous roots of dance, has leaned even more into their role as culture-bearers, providing reading lists and other resources on dance history on

Originating among the (predominantly Black) rural poor in the Dominican Republic in the latter half of the twentieth century, bachata music and the accompanying dance steps were stigmatized by the sociopolitical elite as vulgar, low-class forms of entertainment unsuitable for polite society.

their website, and leading virtual workshops for dance communities around the country. Meanwhile, [In Lak'ech Dance](#), the nation's first queer and trans-centered Latin dance academy, renamed their academy's flagship event the Queer Afro Latin Dance Festival (previously the Queer Latin Dance Festival). Dance publications, like [Seattle Dances](#), [Dancers' Notes](#), and [For the Love of Bachata](#), have all posted accessible online resources around anti-racism in dance, and Latin dance specifically. Yet, beyond a handful of examples, it is difficult to find Latin dance organizations whose initial willingness to engage in anti-racist work has formed a prominent part of their teaching or performance. Angélica Medina, co-founder of In Lak'ech Dance, pointed to the consequences of superficial commitment in her statement on the renamed festival: "[A]s important as words are, words without action are performative allyship, and do little to address the matters at hand. The [festival] name change is just the beginning: there is so much work to be done."

What does this work look like for Latin dancers? As a woman of color who is neither Black nor Latinx, I have approached this question both through observing the other

dancers around me grapple with this question and through conducting academic research on the phenomenology of the dancing body. In my work, I pay close attention to what the body does and how the body feels, and how this relates to deeper histories of oppression and liberation. This is a useful approach when thinking about the political dimension of dance: unlike other art forms, like painting or literature, stories are told and retold by dancers every time their bodies move. Our dancing bodies betray the truth about our political commitments whether we like it or not. Years of capitalist and white supremacist structuring forces shape the possibilities available for social justice commitment through dance, and straightforward aesthetic or optic change is well-intentioned, but largely insufficient in redressing this reality. What is required is a keener attentiveness to how white supremacist capitalism becomes embedded in the very gestures performed by dancers on stage or screen.

The Dominican dance form bachata is the perfect case study for how dancers embody social forces that operate at odds with their political commitments, in large part due to the history of how the dance has changed over the years in response to socioeconomic pressures. The majority of popular Latin dance styles like salsa, bachata, and merengue originated as social dances, loose collections of steps and gestures that often developed organically and in parallel with the corresponding musical genre. Social dances are, at their core, improvisational forms of movement, and can often play important social roles, functioning as entertainment, communication, modes of cultural transmission, and methods of constructing gender and ethnic identities. Critic Jane Desmond [has illustrated the process](#) by which social dances,

especially those which originate among lower-class and racially marginalized communities, are codified and standardized in order to be packaged up as commodities to be resold to consumers in the form of dance lessons. Not only are these dance forms fixed in place and molded to become legible through numbers, counts, and step combinations to make for easier teaching, but their absorption into mainstream culture in the Global North usually follows an established process of what Desmond calls "whitening." Over the course of the twentieth century, dance styles originating in Black and/or lower-class communities (like tango, certain kinds of jazz dances, and the waltz) needed to be stripped of those elements perceived as ethnically or sexually loaded, like extremely close holds, interlocking legs, thrusting or gyrating pelvic motions, and bent knees, in order to appeal to upper- and middle-class white consumers who wanted to experience culturally exciting modes of movement without forsaking their respectability and, by extension, their whiteness.

Bachata is no exception to this process. Originating among the (predominantly Black) rural poor in the Dominican Republic in the latter half of the twentieth century, bachata music and the accompanying dance steps were stigmatized by the sociopolitical elite as vulgar, low-class forms of entertainment unsuitable for polite society. However, with increased migration from the Dominican Republic to the United States in the last few decades, and with popular musicians like Juan Luis Guerra and Aventura raising the profile of bachata music in the Caribbean and in North America alike, bachata quickly became a fixture at Latin dance clubs as a kind of little sister to salsa, supposedly easier to learn because of the simple four-count and lateral basic step that itself was first developed outside of the Dominican Republic (as opposed to the bolero-inspired box step that forms the basis of bachata in the dance's homeland). This former pariah of Dominican society reached a level of standardization that allowed for easy teaching and learning in dance clubs across the country, and by 2010 bachata was included alongside traditional heavyweights like salsa and cha-cha-cha in high-profile competitions like the World Latin Dance Cup.

Beyond the usual process of standardization, whitening, and desexualization that Desmond describes as common to many social dance forms, though, bachata underwent a particularly dramatic transformation in the early twenty-first century, when white Spanish dancers Jorge Escalona and Judith Cordero created a new dance style they christened bachata sensual. Though they retained the musical count and basic step of the traditional dance form, including the soft tap or hip pop that has become the hallmark of bachata dancing, they replaced almost all the main elements of Dominican bachata with modes of movement more typically associated with ballroom dance, including elongated and elevated postures and arm movements, body rolls, and dramatic dips and drops. Over time, as the popularity of this new dance form exploded across North America and Europe in particular, [bachata sensual dancers](#) became known for their predilection for remixes of popular English-language songs over Dominican bachata music, and, especially for female dancers, form-fitting bodysuits and high heels to emphasize the sharp lines and artistic poses of bachata sensual choreography. In contrast, "traditional" or "Dominican" bachata maintained a focus on nimble, playful footwork performed to fast-paced Dominican music, often by Afro-Dominican bachata legends like Luis Vargas, Anthony Santos or Raulín Rodríguez. Many bachata instructors position themselves as somewhere between these two styles, often conceived

of as oppositional poles, and traditional bachata and bachata sensual often peacefully coexist at festivals and clubs all over the world.

Nonetheless, despite the utopian mission of dance festivals to provide a kind of artistic buffet for the enjoyment of their patrons who can sample everything from belly dance to voguing in a safe and inclusive environment, it is impossible to sidestep the political and moral associations with any of these forms of dance, and bachata is a crucial touchstone here. For many dancers committed to anti-racism, traditional bachata represents a deeper appreciation of and engagement with Afro-Latinx cultural creativity and therefore offers an opportunity to embody pro-Black aesthetic and corporeal politics. Embracing or rejecting bachata sensual becomes an easy shorthand for marking out one's ideological territory, and it is not hard to see how a performance or class by white European dancers, clad in leggings and high heels and showing off their ballroom-sized arm styling and chest isolations, might seem to contradict the commitments to anti-racist work that many of us profess to hold.

It is certainly a fool's errand to attempt to trace a straight line from pre-enslavement African rhythms to today's bachata footwork, and there is undoubtedly an essentializing element to any argument that traditional bachata, itself commodified and standardized for the circulation of forms of entertainment within capitalism, as well as subject to the inevitable shifts of historical and geographical transmission, is somehow perfectly representative of a mythical Blackness altogether absent from bachata sensual. However, if we take as a starting point the phenomenological assumption that our body is our opening onto the world, along with the common refrain among dancers and dance scholars alike, that dance is one means of creating new worlds, then it so follows that the postures we choose to inhabit, the movements we choose to incorporate, in many ways reflect the kinds of worlds we want to create, enliven, tear down, and imagine anew. It is the job of festival promoters, year in and year out, to decide for themselves the role, if any, that European takes on Caribbean dance forms should play in the Latin dance world, but it is clear that political commitments cannot remain purely in the aesthetic or representational realm when it comes to dance. Dance, being naturally corporeal, necessarily embodied, carries within its shapes and lines the residue of centuries of violence and oppression, as well as the latent possibility for reconnection and liberation. Even if it is not stated, it will certainly be felt. If we are to honor our commitments to social justice within Latin dance, we must recognize the processes of whitening,

As we slowly return to dancing together in the world instead of purely on our screens, we must continue to make space for open conversations about politics and prioritize history lessons given by culture-bearers that enable us to truly grasp the significance of the "Afro" in "Afro-Latinx."

commodification, and standardization we help to perpetuate every time we teach or take a class, or promote a dance form stripped of its historical and social context.

As we slowly return to dancing together in the world instead of purely on our screens, we must continue to make space for open conversations about politics and prioritize history lessons given by culture-bearers that enable us to truly grasp the significance of the "Afro" in "Afro-Latinx." Further, we must be willing to venture beyond familiarity and prestige when choosing dance teachers, and instead engage with **voices** who do not enjoy the same platform as many heavyweights in the field, but whose histories and movements have much to teach us about the dance forms we hold dear. Thanks in part to the increased access to virtual classes during the pandemic, we have more power than ever before to educate ourselves through workshops and reading, to form connections with dancers beyond our usual social sphere, and to use this moment of pause to reimagine our movement praxis once we can all safely dance together again. In doing so, we will move away from attempting to loosen the knots of historical marginalization through name changes and hiring choices alone, toward a focus on the rhythms and freedoms we accord to our dancing bodies.

A writer and critic originally from the United Kingdom, **CHIARA GIOVANNI** is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature. She is working on an essay collection about desire, care, and intimacy, and how these concepts structure 21st-century novels, Latin dance clubs, and our post-COVID bedrooms. The pandemic propelled conversations about the importance of desire, care, and intimacy into the mainstream; even as it wanes, Chiara intends to keep the spotlight on these themes within academic scholarship and beyond.

Chiara writes a [newsletter](#) that blends scholarly criticism, cultural commentary, and personal essay; she also tweets at @carambalache.

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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 are now more than a year into a period of transition and re-framing. Re-framing the idea of work. Re-framing the ideas of academia. Re-framing our home lives. Re-framing our global perspective.

As a local community, we are re-examining what it means to make art and to be an artist. We are seeking to understand beyond our own past perspectives. For some that has meant giving their bodies rest. For others it has meant a deeper investigation of the body and where the source of movement comes from.

In this edition of *In Conversation* I was able to speak with Latanya D. Tigner and Colette Eloi about the Back to the Root/Dancing Cy(i)phers series and the rich, extensive discourse around the African roots of dance and their place in academia.

We asked ourselves large questions including, Where is the African diaspora dance education in the Bay Area? Who can teach it? Is there space to reshape what it means to learn "ethnic" dances? What opportunities are there for those trained in culturally-specific dance?

Latanya D. Tigner performs professionally with Dimensions Dance Theater, lectures at UC Berkeley, and is certified in Talawa Technique™ (Akimbo Level). Latanya has created commissioned works for Dimensions and other local cultural organizations, including Cal Shakes' critically acclaimed *black odyssey*, for which she was nominated for a Theater Bay Area Award in 2017. Latanya currently serves as Co-Artistic Director of the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, is a founding member of Oakland Anti-Racism Organizing Committee, and is the curatorial director of Dancing Cy(i)phers, an annual symposium that connects the coded languages of African rooted dance through ongoing research.

Colette Eloi is a doctoral student currently, ending her coursework in the Critical Dance Studies program at UC Riverside, where she also teaches. She is an accomplished dancer and artistic director/commissioned choreographer, educator, guest lecturer, and researcher. Eloi has taught Dance history, Dance and Cosmology, Dance and Revolution, Haitian dance, jazz, black vernacular, modern (Dunham and Horton techniques), Caribbean, Latin and

African dance professionally. Her research findings and dance/music performance experiences of 20+ years have augmented her understanding of African Diaspora dance. She has toured locally, nationally, and internationally performing at major festivals, learning institutions, and culture facilities.

LATANYA D. TIGNER

For me, [an important thing I've learned is] to be true to yourself, true to your vision. You know, really understanding and honoring who you are in that—whatever that is, whoever you are—really speaking to that. And understanding that your voice is valid in your making and it deserves to be out there in the world. It took me a while to understand who I am, like I'm still figuring that out.

— LATANYA D. TIGNER



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTIST

COLETTE ELOI

Because [academia is] so stuck on the Black body as a political construct that holds all of this negativity and trauma that this neoliberalism, they talk about it in this way like, "You can never escape this identity." You know, and part of it is because the way that you study in school, you repeat it and you live inside these same discourses and it's like you're trapped in the discourse! And you don't get to live past it. And that's why it's so important for dancers to write about dance. — COLETTE ELOI



PHOTO BY RU MUNA



LISTEN HERE



By ASHLEY GAYLE

WHENEVER SOMEONE ASKS ME to identify or define Jazz dance, I never have an easy answer. The Jazz dance tree is very dense: between Classic Jazz, Broadway Jazz, Contemporary Jazz, Urban Jazz, Jazz Funk, Afro-Jazz, Latin Jazz, Commercial Jazz, Street Jazz, and Lyrical Jazz, I can see why we've lost some of the history that inspired these sub-genres of Jazz. And while folks seem to recognize several characteristics of the style, they only scratch the surface of an African American dance form that serves as the foundation of popular styles like Funk, Disco, Hip-Hop, and Breakdance.

Because the dances of so many music videos and halftime shows are rooted in Jazz, it has become hard to see the vernacular, social dance roots of the form. I've been inspired to reconnect with the roots of Jazz and learn more about its diverse history by embedding it throughout my dance career as a professional artist and educator.

Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver's book, *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches*, sits on my bedside table, and I recently watched the documentary *Uprooted: The Journey of Jazz* directed by Khadifa Wong. These two sources confirmed the feeling I had leaving college, that Jazz is so much more than the commercialized version we see on mainstream media. There's a rich history made up of a long list of trailblazers and dance legends that goes beyond Bob Fosse,

Jack Cole, Gus Giordano, and Luigi to include names like Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Pepsi Bethel, and Frank Hatchett, among many others. Many dancers today can name the first four artists, and either have never heard of or associate some of the latter four with modern dance forms. I challenge dance educators, instructors, studio owners, and dancers themselves to dig deeper and spend time learning the history of their dance movement, including the early dance legends who provided the roots and platform for what we celebrate in dance today. Jazz is rooted in African American culture with origins traced back to the end of slavery and the beginning years of "freedom" for the Black community. The rise of Jazz music inspired a social dance r/evolution that makes up a lot of what we see in popular dance styles and trends today. Early dances like the Cakewalk

and the Pattin' Juba that led to Tap and Ballroom spin-offs like the Swing and Charleston showcase the connection and influence of Jazz music, its style, rhythm, and improvisation. The Savoy Ballroom in New York was a popular destination for Jazz musicians and dancers to show off their skills and keep up with the latest moves and sounds. The Lindy Hop, Jive, and Shimmy were dance styles that emerged from the Savoy's dance community between the 1920s and 1940s. The musicians were inspired by Swing and Blues, call and response, improvisation, and poly-rhythms in their compositions, which you can see reflected in the dancing of that time. This connection between Jazz dance and Jazz music is something I wish to see more of in the dance spaces I've occupied since childhood.

MY STORY WITH JAZZ started when my local dance studio, Adrienne's Dance Studio, announced they would be offering a Jazz class for my age group. As an 8-year-old I was so excited to learn this new style that was always the most exciting to watch at our recitals: set to pop music and featuring strong lines, multiple pirouettes, high kicks, big leaps, sassy faces, and the fabulous "kick-ball-change jazz square." I took Jazz all the way through high school, performing showstopping routines on competition teams throughout my teens. At this point, Jazz was my favorite dance style, but I had no historical knowledge of its roots or basic information about its legacy. And I definitely didn't have the vocabulary to articulate any

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) BY JASON HAIRSTON, JAMES IRWIN, NOAH JAMES

IF I WANT TO EDUCATE DANCERS ABOUT JAZZ, I need to create the space for the Early Jazz experience to transpire within my classes.

of the forms’ deeper meanings. I was mostly focused on mastering my technique to perform the “tricks” that were celebrated at competitions and local performances.

When I got to UC Irvine, I quickly discovered that I was just one of many students who were the top dancers at their home studios. We spent the first quarter comparing our split leaps, fouette turns, and illusions—a competition jazz turn where the dancer dives their head to the floor while shooting their leg to the sky—while dancing to Lady Gaga, Britney Spears, and whomever else was playing on the radio. But during my second quarter, we got a new Jazz professor, Dr. Sheron Wray. Dr. Wray single-handedly shifted the vibe, curriculum, and essence of Jazz in our department. She came in with a very codified technique (part of the Matt Mattox curriculum); played only Jazz music; celebrated African-American vernacular dance movement vocabulary (movements I’d seen my mom doing at family house parties); and gave us structured improvisation prompts in every single class. I felt like the few dancers of color and I collectively exhaled upon learning her style. After three years learning Jazz under Dr. Wray’s direction, I had completely changed my relationship to, knowledge of, and love for Jazz dance.

When I graduated from college, I walked away with a love for Jazz music, its expressive range and “aesthetic of cool,” a deeper appreciation

for improvisation, and a balance of playfulness, release, contraction, dynamics, rhythm, theatrics, and stretch that inspires my practice today. There’s a magic to the early roots of Jazz that I would love to see in more classes and performances throughout the Bay Area and beyond. When I look around the Bay Area dance scene, there’s a short list of studios that offer Jazz and if they do, it’s usually Contemporary based at prominent studios and Hip-Hop based in underground studios. Where can we find “Early Jazz,” Jazz taught with the early fundamentals of the dance form as a base? I look to Bay Area Dance leaders such as Antoine Hunter and Reginald Savage, who have preserved Jazz by creating dance companies centered around the form. I would love to see this list grow, celebrating Early Jazz, from the music to the freestyle jam sessions, to the community filled with heart-warming vibes right here in the Bay Area. Jazz deserves to be just as popular as Ballet, Modern, and Hip-Hop, especially since it incorporates all three styles seamlessly, which is what I try to highlight within my teaching practice.

As a dance teacher, I have recently held myself accountable to how I curate and lead the intentions of my classes. I’ve been teaching Jazz ever since I left college, but around four years ago, I decided I no longer wanted to teach Studio/Competition Jazz based classes. If I want to educate dancers about Jazz, I need

to create the space for the Early Jazz experience to transpire within my classes. I decided to research the art form as deeply as I could, from reading books, to engaging in discussions with community members, to finding grainy videos from the early 1900s on YouTube. What I gathered is that Jazz is truly an experience and I cannot effectively teach it until I immerse students in the Jazz sensibility.

I started with creating a Jazz-only playlist; all the music I play, from warm-up to across the floor to final combination, is Jazz-based, spanning decades and styles from Blues Jazz and Afro Jazz to Latin Jazz and Funk Jazz. Some of the artists on my playlist are legends like Herbie Hancock, John Coltrane, Stevie Wonder, and Nina Simone; others are independent and emerging artists I find on Spotify from countries all around the world. There’s a great list of artists in “Neo-Jazz,” which gives a fresh outlook on what Jazz music can offer.

In terms of my pedagogy, I started using improvisation as a way to teach concepts in class, like playfulness with your dynamics, incorporating Jazz movement into your personal style, connecting with different rhythms in the music while in motion, and helping dancers find an expressive movement style to build upon. I also began introducing different ways to connect and respond to the music, exploring polyrhythms by initiating movement patterns based on the track. Once the pandemic hit, I started incorporating groove-based movements into my warm-ups and choreography, like the Grapevine or the Prep, popular movements from the Funk era—and what a difference that made! I eventually started picking my favorite Jazz dance legends to honor every month, discussing some of their history and impact on the dance field, and tailoring my curriculum to their specific technique or movement vocabulary.

Reflecting on my journey with Jazz inspires me to share my story and



PHOTO BY JP STUDIOS

encourage others to deepen their practice by knowing and celebrating the roots. In the same way we uphold the legacy of Ballet and Modern, from studios to universities, we must give Jazz the same appreciation by enriching students with its full history. If you come to my class, you will walk away with more than just tips for how to stick a double turn or hold a Lateral T; you

will walk away with a piece of Jazz history that will inspire and uplift the feel-good dance magic that keeps us all coming back for more.

ASHLEY GAYLE graduated from UC Irvine with a B.F.A in Dance Performance and a minor in Business Management. She’s performed with PUSH Dance Company, Mix’d Ingrdnts, and Urban Jazz Dance Company, among many other companies. Ashley Gayle teaches youth and adults throughout the Bay Area; including

Shawl-Anderson Dance Center, UC Berkeley/CalPerformances Ailey Camp, Cal State East Bay, K-12 schools throughout the Bay Area, to name a few. Her current endeavor is Co-Directing Visceral Roots Dance Company and presenting choreography rooted in telling stories inspired by social justice for minorities. She has presented work throughout the Bay Area for the past few years at many festivals and residences. She currently serves on the Board for SADC and teaches weekly Adult Jazz classes on Saturday mornings. Please visit www.ashleygayle.org to stay in touch!

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored shirt and blue pants, is sitting on a dark rock in the middle of a vast field of tall, golden-brown corn stalks. The field stretches out to the horizon, creating a sense of isolation and contemplation.

WHERE DO

WE GO

FROM HERE?

Kularts and Alleluia Panis Set the Stage for
Indigeneity and Decolonization in Performance
Narratives of the Filipinx Diaspora

BY ALYSSA MANANSALA

I**FIRST ENCOUNTERED KULARTS**, the premier presenter of contemporary and tribal Filipinx arts in the United States, during a homecoming in the summer of 2019. I'd been living in Los Angeles where I was working as an adjunct professor, teaching courses in Asian American literature and media. At that early stage in my academic career, I'd already begun to feel jaded about the fields of Asian American and Filipinx studies—as a second-generation Filipino American, I struggled with the ways postcoloniality and decolonization had become trendy vernacular, easily thrown around and lauded, but much less easily enacted. For those of us in the Filipinx diaspora who wish to dismantle structures of neocolonialism, globalization, capitalism, and racism, decolonization at individual and community levels is a necessary procedure. But, jargon and theory aside, where do we begin?

I grew up in Daly City, just a 15-minute BART ride from Kularts' homebase in the SoMa neighborhood, which was once a hub for Filipino working-class migrants and activists, and is now perhaps more readily associated with high-rise lofts and tech startups. As a creative writing student invested in POC literary and arts communities, I had been involved with different projects led by Kearny Street Workshop, a frequent collaborator of Kularts. In fact, it was poet and Kearny Street director, Jason Bayani, who had led me to the exhibit entitled *PostColonial Survival Kit*, curated by Kularts at the Luggage Store Gallery (also SoMa-based). Kularts' press release stated that the exhibit "addresses the ways Pilipinx have coped, survived, and adapted to the diasporic life that includes the challenges of racism, marginalization, and the ways that colonization has affected the interpersonal, the familial, and intra-communal relationships."¹ Bayani, whose poetry collection, *Locus*, had been published earlier that year, joined a lineup of other Filipinx poets, musicians, and dancers for an event entitled "Hip Hop as Survival Kit," which was part of a series staged over the course of the exhibit's run. Hoping to hear some of Bayani's new poems and purchase his book, I arrived at the gallery early and walked through the collection of artworks, including video installations, sculptures, and paintings by artists from the US, Australia, and the Philippines.

I was immediately taken by the work of Caroline Garcia, a Filipino Australian artist based in New York. Her piece, *Queen of the Carabao*, is composed of two videos projected side by side against adjacent walls of the gallery. Each projection shows Garcia mounted atop a carabao (a species of water buffalo native to the Philippines) at different angles, switching between passive aerial views of the back of her head and direct, face-to-face confrontation in the wide. She is clad in a traditional *baro at saya* top and high-waisted jeans, her long, black hair gracing her exposed neck and shoulders, her bare feet dangling on either side of

the carabao's ribs. She rides the beast in slow motion through her father's ancestral lands in Pampanga (the same province from which my parents hail). Volcanoes and gray skies in the distant landscape frame her homecoming, past rows of corn stalks, dried husks gently swaying. She holds a rope in her palm that passes through the animal's snout and toward the camera's lens. Garcia describes the piece as a confrontation with "homecoming and cultural memory."² As beholder and object of the artist's gaze, witness and somehow also participant to her mythic homecoming, I felt the pull of kinship and a ruthless untethering, as if I as audience were engaged in a slow, painful, interconnected dance with the work. The figure I saw was like me and unlike me, our separate bloodlines intersecting in the same ancestral land of our fathers. While our diasporic trajectories had flung us to opposite plots of the world, her work became integral to my research and questions around decoloniality and postcoloniality.

When I began working with Alleluia Panis as an intern in the summer of 2021 (thanks again to Bayani who had kindly put me in contact with her), I quickly learned that with every event or performance it facilitates, every artist or group it spotlights, and every film, dance, or visual art project it helms, Kularts is always creating opportunities for individuals of the Filipino diaspora to find each other, and in doing so, find agency and power through our shared histories. Founded in 1985 by Panis and two other artists as a dance and music performance ensemble formerly known as Kulintang Arts Ensemble, in honor of the traditional musical style, Kularts has evolved over the years to become a community-oriented organization whose work in arts programming and curation has facilitated Filipinx diasporic communities across geographic and generational divides to come together to produce art, convene, and dialogue. Panis' ever-evolving vision for the future of creative work produced within and for the Filipinx diaspora has included curating art by local, regional, and international artists, bringing indigenous Filipino artists to the Bay Area to showcase their work and educate

"Man@ng Is Deity"
2021 restaging: a
re-imagination of
SF's dance halls/
nightclubs on Kearny
Street/Manilatown.



US-born artists, and hosting a tribal tour to the Mindanao region to further expose diasporic Filipino artists to the work and tutelage of indigenous practitioners. By fostering these collaborations and conversations, Kularts has been a key player in steering and defining Filipinx diasporic art, intellectual, and cultural production. In a press release for *PostColonial Survival Kit*, Wilfred Galila, Kularts' media director and featured artist, writes, "Our power lies in our various ways of being, and our embrace of our hybridity. By reconciling the postcolonial with our indigenous selves, we go beyond mere survival and towards a healing process and the manifestation of our utmost potential that lies dormant within all of us."³

KULARTS PUTS FILIPINX diasporic creative and intellectual producers in conversation largely through its live dance performances and film projects. For example, *Man@ng*

For those of us in the Filipinx diaspora who wish to dismantle structures of neocolonialism, globalization, capitalism, and racism, decolonizations at individual and community levels is a necessary procedure.

Is Deity, which was first staged in 2019, centers around the character Valentino Pablo, one of the *manong* generation of Filipino men who first arrived in the US as farmworkers after the US occupation of the Philippines. While the *manongs* provided essential cheap labor to the US, they were time and again denied both citizenship and humanity. By staging historically-based narratives inspired by real-life accounts from Filipinos living in San Francisco from the 1920s through 1960s, and using both contemporary and indigenous dance forms, Kularts educates younger generations of Filipino Americans about the struggles and victories of their migrant predecessors.

While Kularts' roots lie in Indigenous Filipino dance and traditions, Panis is aware of the complexities that differentiate a Filipino American migrant/diasporic experience from an indigenous Filipino one.

Further, Kularts' curated exhibits like *PostColonial Survival Kit* bring together artists and performers, exposing local and global audiences to their work. The organization regularly hosts panel series, which in the online format during the Covid-19 pandemic have become essential to maintaining community and collaborative thinking during quarantine. Kularts' most recent series, *Nursing These Wounds*, put artists, poets, scholars, activists, and nurses in dialogue to investigate the colonial underpinnings of Filipinx nurses in the US, to mourn the staggering loss of life that the Covid-19 pandemic has wrought upon Filipino communities nation-wide, and to demonstrate how art and performance allow Filipino nurses to have their humanity recognized. While these women are often relegated to media statistics or footnotes to a larger field, Kularts has allowed them to share personal narratives in complex, formally experimental ways.

WHILE KULARTS' ROOTS LIE IN Indigenous Filipino dance and traditions, Panis is aware of the complexities that differentiate a Filipino American migrant/diasporic experience from an indigenous Filipino one. In a conversation about how she classifies her artistic practice, she told me that she does not consider her work to be "Philippine" dance, as that would be disrespectful to regional practitioners who undergo rigorous study, practice, and discipline that she as a choreographer and dancer who has lived most of her life in the US has not undergone: "Their work is not my work, and I don't want to steal that fire because I am an American artist. But at the same time, Philippine dance, particularly indigenous forms, informs my work. It's really from the diasporic experience that it is anchored on. I have to push the distinction because I think it's important." Panis also expressed anxiety about how artists of color in the United States receive an automatic assignation of ethnic or indigenous aesthetic or cultural form, which she views as an affront to the practitioners of Philippine dance. Of the diasporic distinction she makes in her own work, she said, "What I'm trying to do is express my own personhood, meaning I do have deep connections in Philippine culture, but most definitely I'm American."

Further, while Panis does not claim indigenous Philippine artistic practice, she does claim indigeneity at the personal level: "You and I cannot claim our indigeneity. But you can't take it away from me." This comes as

a response to recent debates over what constitutes authentic or original indigeneity, as Filipinos of the indigenous ethnic majority have come under fire for appropriating or erasing Katutubo and Lumad indigenous cultural practices. Panis points to how the Phil-

ippines' roughly 200 different ethnolinguistic groups have been homogenized not only by the Western imagination, but also by the Filipino diaspora. She continues: "I am indigenous. My people are not settlers, nor of Spanish or Castillian heritage." In her claim to indigeneity at the personal level and simultaneous refusal of indigeneity at the level of craft, Panis points to a tension that persists for the Filipino diaspora: we must at once recognize the Philippines' vast diversity of indigenous groups, and remain vigilant of how our own claims to that indigenous diversity might commit a type of erasure.

Panis' remarks surprised me. I felt conflicted, particularly as I was trying to align my own definitions of postcoloniality at the individual, creative, and academic levels with my attempts to decolonize the structures I inhabit as a scholar, artist, and diasporic subject. Panis destabilizes notions of postcoloniality, decoloniality, and indigeneity, challenging theories in Filipinx studies that center authenticity and originality. For example, Leny Mendoza Strobel's *Coming Full Circle: The Process of Decolonization Among Post-1965 Filipino Americans* describes the process of decolonization as a Filipino American's return to indigeneity after a period, perhaps a lifetime, of internalized colonialism. Characterizing this colonial mentality as a state of schizophrenia, Strobel highlights a common saying among Filipino Americans—that they are "lost within themselves" (*Ang Pilipinong nawawala sa sarili*) as a result of colonial domination, debasement, and erasure of indigenous culture. The call to decolonize suggests finding oneself by undoing the psychological and social effects of Spanish and American colonization, and forging a strong Filipino identity. Strobel defines this process as crossing both time—"a process that makes the mythical and historical past available to the present"—and geographical space—"to develop the ability to become a border crosser."⁴ She presents an actionable maxim for decolonization that emphasizes its temporal and spatial dimensions: "To decolonize is to ask: Where do I go from here?"⁵

Panis rejects indigeneity as a classification for her creative practice; at the same time, she refuses to relinquish indigeneity as a personal or communal identifier, in the attempt to combat homogenization of the Philippines' ethnic and indigenous diversity. In doing so, Panis complicates Strobel's assertion of "finding oneself," or a return to an authentic indigeneity, as a means to decolonization. For Panis, "finding oneself" means to locate oneself within many divergent histories and geographies, to understand an "authentic self" as constantly negotiated along varying politics and personal narratives. The dance and performance that Kularts curates and choreographs indeed intermingle past and present, the here and over there of the Filipinx diaspora and of Philippine indigeneity. While Strobel's study might simplify the process of decolonizing the diasporic self as finding oneself within an authentic indigeneity, Kularts' and Panis' overarching strategies complicate *Coming Full Circle* as a decolonizing guide—in all their projects, they aim to retell history through complex personal narrative and bring together indigenous and diasporic cultural producers to learn from each other. Kularts' and Panis' projects never minimize the differences between a diasporic and an indigenous experience, particularly in the context of dance practice, and

FILM IMAGE COURTESY OF KULARTS

always emphasize the need for those of the Filipinx diaspora to observe indigenous cultural practices, in order to understand our histories and our decolonial futures. At the same time, the work allows for diasporic traditions and aesthetic forms to stand on their own, albeit informed by indigenous practices, while still honoring their own geographic and temporal contexts located within second-generation experiences.

SHE WHO CAN SEE, Panis' first dance film under the New American Dance Theater Series first released in 2018, is based on true accounts of second-generation Filipino Americans who claimed to have the ability to communicate with spirits, a tradition carried over from indigenous practice after several generations of migration and resettling in the US. The film is told through dance and is meant as a commentary on the ways Western contemporary society pathologizes such abilities, despite aboriginal cultures' reverence toward them as sacred ancestral gifts. In her directorial statement, Panis writes, "On the larger perspective, this piece is a metaphor for our search of the authentic self. I hope to honor and reflect our experiences as contemporary people, who are navigating and searching for the right balance between our ancestral ways of knowing and the modern world."⁶



"She, Who Can See," featuring dancers who appear as spirits dressed in white with face paint.

THE SEARCH FOR ONE'S AUTHENTIC SELF is not achieved by simply discovering an authentic indigenous past—that past in fact contains multitudes, and to reduce it to one discoverable entity replicates the very structures that decolonization aims to deconstruct. Kularts' projects fold the temporal and spatial dimensions of history and identity through dance, performance, visual media, and curation, complicating the relationship between the Filipinx diaspora and Philippine indigeneity. In these works, decolonization might be better understood not only as practice and enactment, but a willingness to sit with the complexities of diasporic vs. indigenous embodiment, which also means understanding the past to understand our present and future, and locating those histories across geographic borders such that indigenous practice can inform the dias-

As Strobel writes, decolonization, as an expressive or reflective process, should ultimately have action as its goal—the enactment of a material deconstruction of neo-colonial structures for marginalized communities.

poric. By providing opportunities for Filipinos across spatial and temporal locations to find ourselves and each other in dialogue and collaboration without simplifying indigeneity as a means toward self- and communal-discovery, Kularts' programs also demonstrate how dance and performance in particular provide a unique creative and intellectual venue to explore the spatial and temporal dimensions of decolonization, while also enacting structural change through community-oriented projects.

As Strobel writes, decolonization, as an expressive or reflective process, should ultimately have action as its goal—the enactment of a material deconstruction of neo-colonial structures for marginalized communities. Kularts as a creatively, politically, and community-oriented organization has not only produced and curated visual/performance projects and intellectual/community events that examine such issues, but it is also actively engaged in the material redistribution of the SoMa neighborhood, which has seen the demolition and reselling of many historic sites central to Filipinx migrant and community activism, including the famous I-Hotel. In collaboration with other community activism organizations, Kularts will participate in the planning of the 5M Project, a 10-year phased proposal that will transition the current four-acre site at 5th, Mission, and Howard Streets into a mix of office, residential, retail, and cultural spaces.⁷ Panis has already begun planning fundraising efforts to establish Kularts' first permanent performance venue at the site (previous programs were staged in other cultural and community

venues around SoMa; Panis estimates a total of \$1.5 million in funding will be needed). Panis views this transition as an opportunity for the Filipinx community to claim its own cultural district, elevated to the same level as such venues as the San Francisco Ballet and Opera House. Further, a permanent venue also strengthens Kularts' ability to maintain the SoMa district as a foothold for Filipinx community activism and cultural production, while continuing to bring in indigenous practitioners from the Philippines to educate US-born artists.

Kularts' upcoming performance and dance projects include a refilming of *Man@ng Is Deity*, to be screened in December 2021 with excerpts of the original 2019 version, and another screening of *She Who Can See* at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts from August to October 2021

as part of the SF Urban Film Fest. The restaging of these projects alludes to a temporal and geographic cyclicity in all of Kularts' endeavors—there is a haunting quality to the stories they have already told and will tell again. That audiences might [re]discover these works suggests not exactly a timelessness, but a continual process of *beginning again*, a process of

locating an authentic diasporic or indigenous self, starting at the personal level, expanding into the communal, and finding not one, but multiple selves. The split-level consciousness that Strobel describes as schizophrenic might not be a pathology that decolonization destroys or heals; rather, it might be the very method for recognizing and honoring differences between diasporic and indigenous experience. Kularts' and Panis' methodologies for dance, performance, visual media, and curation not only embrace the spatial and temporal dimensions of diaspora, indigeneity, and decoloniality, but repeat them—here and there, again and again.

ALYSSA MANANSALA is an essayist, poet, educator, and PhD student in the department of American Studies at Brown University. Her interests include Asian American poetry and hybrid literary forms, Filipinx studies, postcolonial theory, performance theory, and visual/media culture. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the California Institute of the Arts, where she was awarded the 2018/2019 Teaching Fellowship and the 2019 REEF Artist Residency. Her writing can be found in *Nat. Brut*, *Hyphen Magazine*, *TAYO Literary Magazine*, and *Agape: A Journal of Literary Good Will*, among others.

- 1 <https://www.kularts-sf.org/postcolonial>
- 2 <https://carolinegarcia.com.au/Queen-of-the-Carabao>
- 3 <https://www.asianjournal.com/magazines/something-filipino-magazine/post-colonial-survival-kit-addressing-the-challenges-brought-by-centuries-of-colonization/>
- 4 Strobel, 144–148
- 5 Ibid, 150
- 6 <https://www.kularts-sf.org/she-who-can-see1>
- 7 <https://sfplanning.org/5m-project>

THE BIGGEST CELEBRATION OF THE BAY AREA'S
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SAN FRANCISCO ETHNIC DANCE FESTIVAL

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INFO & TICKETS: WORLDARTSWEST.ORG
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Megan Lowe Dances presents *Tangram*

**Dec 9-12, 2021 at the Joe Goode Annex,
Thu/Sun at 7pm & Fri/Sat at 8pm**

Tangram is a dynamic dance between Megan Lowe and Brenton Cheng that challenges ideas of male/female duets. Using physics/momentum, Brenton and Megan lift/are lifted equally, leveling the playing field and pushing the boundaries of what is possible. As artists with Chinese ancestry, they deconstruct tropes often associated with Chinese heritage. [Learn more](#)

NATASHA CARLITZ DANCE ENSEMBLE

Menagerie

**Oct 15 & 16, 8pm, Cubberley Theatre,
4000 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto**
Purchase tickets [online](#):
\$45 patrons | \$25 general | \$15 students

NCDE returns to the theater in *Menagerie*, introducing the full range of the animal kingdom with dances from the sublime to the ridiculous: playful otters, industrious ants, flowing fish, waltzing penguins, and many more. Join us for this celebration of life in its infinite variety! Great fun for children.

Company dancers and alumnae also worked together remotely to create a video trilogy, *Walls and Windows*, exploring the limits and possibilities of our sheltered-in-place world. [Watch the videos](#)



GERALD CASEL DANCE / *NOT ABOUT RACE DANCE*

Gerald Casel, in collaboration with dance artists Styles Alexander, Audrey Johnson, Karla Quintero, and Cauveri Suresh, will premiere their latest work, *Not About Race Dance*, Dec 2-11 at CounterPulse in San Francisco.

Not About Race Dance critiques the unmarked predominance of whiteness in US postmodernism. It cites Neil Greenberg's *Not About AIDS Dance* to connect the silence around the AIDS epidemic and the unacknowledged racial politics of postmodern dance. Occupying a space defined by white artists, it contests the structural endurance of white postmodernity by disidentifying with the white cube activated by Trisha Brown's *Locus* and asks how difference can be made visible through choreographic structures that historically do not make space for brown and black bodies. [Learn more](#)

FALL TEACHINGS WITH SARA SHELTON MANN

Space as territory/
Sat, Oct 2 at 10am-1pm
Joe Goode Annex
\$30-50

A beginning of basics again and again
and again
Thursdays, Oct 14–Nov 11 at 10am–12pm
Joe Goode Annex
\$20 a class
\$90 for 5 classes
Register before Sep 30th for 5 classes
at \$80

Register for all classes by emailing
ainsleytharp12@gmail.com



Printz Dance Project

Nov 4-6, 11-13 at Joe Goode Annex

Through personal text, storytelling, and dance, *Ink and Bone* centers on the experience of living with chronic pain. As a window into one person's journey, this piece hopes to be a conduit to the universality of these often hidden experiences. This is an honest, at times heartbreaking, at times humorous, and consistently vulnerable exploration.



Arenas Dance Company

Nov 5, 6, 7 at Z Space, SF ADA ARA is based on the tale Ochun Ada Ara – She Who Would Be Queen, in which the Yoruba deity Ochun takes away the crown of Changó to make a point: the world cannot be without women. Presented by CubaCaribe, with choreography by Susana Arenas Pedroso, the work pays homage to female orishas and celebrates Cuban women. Funded in part by the Gerbode Foundation.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER V. ZEE

Kathy Mata Ballet's Winter Holiday Showcase

Sun, Dec 12 at 7-9pm, ODC Theater

Celebrate the Winter Holiday with [Kathy Mata Ballet](#) and enjoy various ballet pieces with live musicians. Performance will also include musical theater, modern, lyrical, contemporary and much more.



Duniya Dance and Drum Company

Upcoming South Asian and West African dance and music performance at the Golden Gate Park Bandshell on Sat, Oct 9, 2021.

[More details coming soon.](#)

[Learn more](#) about ongoing classes: Bhangra with Joti Singh (Mondays), West African dance with Alhassane Da Camara (Wednesdays & Saturdays), West African drumming with Bongo Sidibe (Saturdays)

PHOTO BY VIJAY RAKHRA



PHOTO BY ELLE AIME PHOTOGRAPHY

FLUX VERTICAL THEATRE

[Flux Vertical Theatre](#) is a Bay Area dance company specializing in the art of pole, founded by Kirsten (aka Mz. K) and Leah Marie. For 6 years we have been dancing our way through the Bay Area and beyond with high quality shows featuring performers with backgrounds in classical and contemporary styles of dance, gymnastics, theater, and circus arts. We dreamed of one day having a place of our own to call home and now Flux Vertical Theatre is an academy for future pole stars and a gorgeous performance space. Visit us at 811 University Ave in Berkeley.

Theatre Flamenco of San Francisco Celebrates 55 Years

Theatre Flamenco's productions showcase premiere talent, vivid dance imagery, and flamenco's living lineage to add to the cultural and artistic diversity of the city they've called home since 1966. They promote the integrity of flamenco through classes and performances. They will present a world premiere at the SF International Festival on Oct 24. [Learn more](#)



ARTWORK BY OLIVIA ENG

S.C.A.R.S. (STRENGTH, COURAGE, AND RESILIENCE OF THE SOUL)

Inspired by the Buddhist concept of "turning poison into medicine" and Kintsugi, a Japanese pottery technique in which a broken object is repaired with gold lacquer, [S.C.A.R.S.](#) combines multidisciplinary arts and cross-cultural exchange to foster healing and empowerment through community service, workshops, and dance multi-media films. The films highlight our "scar" stories, and the ways in which ethnic influences, individual choices, practices, and other tools have helped us to heal. *Let Me Be*, an upcoming dance film, addresses BIPOC experiences of accepting and celebrating ethnic traits for which they were once shamed.

PHOTO BY FELIX DE LOJA

International Association of Blacks in Dance celebrates 30 years

Since 1991, [IABD](#) has been the preeminent dance service organization and institutional voice for the Black Dance sector. They proudly honor the significant contributions, connections, and influences that dance by people of African ancestry or origin has on the cultural landscape.

They recently announced their COLLECTIVE Cohort for the 2021 COHI | MOVE program. Bay Area-based organizations Diamano Coura West African Dance Company, Dimensions Dance Theater, and Robert Moses' KIN are among the 25 selected companies that will receive a total of \$41,000 over the next three years.

25 years of swing dancing in Golden Gate Park

Founded in August 1996 by Chad Kubo and Ken Watanabe, [Lindy in the Park](#) is a free social swing dance for dancers of all ages and levels (no partner required). Find them in Golden Gate Park every Sunday at 11am-2pm, weather permitting. They offer a free lesson for beginners at noon.

AXIS Dance Company Artistic Director's Final Season

In AXIS' first official performances since 2019, *re:surge* will feature a final new work from Marc Brew in his capacity as Artistic Director, as well a new work from Rehearsal Director Sonsherée Giles, and *Flora Hereafter: how flowers survive* from 2020 Pina Bausch Fellow, Neve. October 22-23 at Z Space, SF.

Marc Brew first began working with AXIS in 2011 and became Artistic Director in 2017. Brew will step down at the end of this year and will be moving back to the UK to be with his partner. The new Artistic Director will be choreographer, writer, and performer Nadia Adame. An AXIS Dance Company alum, she studied ballet and flamenco in her native Spain and has worked with Candoco (UK) and Compañía Y (Spain).



ODC THEATER GUEST CURATORS. PHOTO COURTESY OF ODC THEATER

Gerbode Foundation Awards Eight \$50,000 Commissions

The 2021 Choreography Awards is the first round of the [Special Awards in the Arts program](#) and is a three-year, \$900,000 initiative to support the commissioning of individual artists creating new works in dance (2021), theater (2022), and music/sound design (2023). Congratulations to the recipients: Artists in Motion Bay Area & Pilipino Education Project/Patrick Cruz, Authentic Arts & Media/jose esteban abad, Dance Mission Theater/Adia Tamar Whitaker, Mahea Uchiyama Center for International Dance/Meridith Kawekiu Aki, Mosaic America/My-Linh Le, Noorani Dance/ Farah Yasmeen Shaikh, The Lab SF/Indira Allegra, and Zaccho Dance Theatre/Veronica Blair.

Grown Women Dance Collective Launches New Program

The Joyful Movement Whole Life program is a Black-led, scalable, evidence-based program that will help erode barriers to wellness in Black and Brown communities. They train and mentor residents from Bay Area disinvested neighborhoods to become audacious movement educators and leaders in their communities. The two-year program starts in Oct 2021 and is fully funded by grants and donations and is offered to students 100% cost-free.

[Read more...](#)

ODC Theater Announces Curatorial Teams

Charles Slender-White (FACT/SF) and Amara Tabor-Smith (Deep Waters Dance Theater), along with ODC Theater Creative Director Chloë L. Zimberg, will curate ODC Theater's annual two-week summer festival, which is scheduled for June 2022, and its fall season. This collaborative approach to the festival aims to highlight the diversity of the dance field and center the voices of artists from outside of ODC.

Marlene Garcia, Alleluia Panis, Farah Yasmeen Shaikh, Dazaun Soleyn, and Leyya Mona Tawil will select projects for ODC Theater's new Rentals Discount Initiative, which begins in 2022. The equity-focused program offers space usage for free or at a 50% discount to selected artists. At least 15 of the 19 weeks will be allocated to artists who identify as Black, Native or Indigenous, People of Color, women, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQIA2S+.

[Read more...](#)

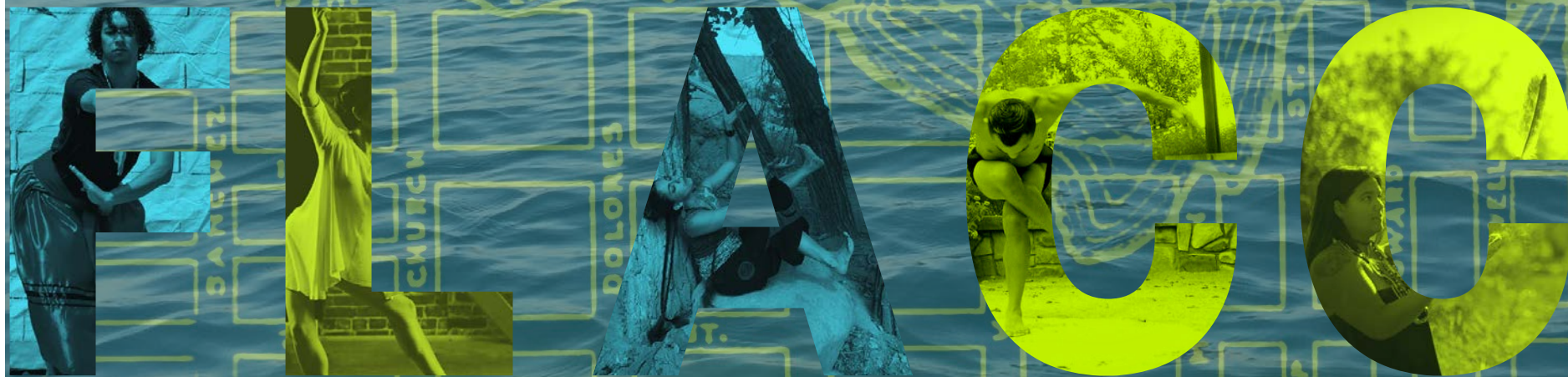
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CUBA CARIBE

Preserving and promoting Caribbean culture



8th Annual Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers
In partnership with Dance Mission Theater, Mission High School and San Francisco Recreation and Parks



sii agua sí

Remembering Water in Yelamu
sii = water (Ohlone Ramaytush)

OCT 23, 2021
7pm - 9pm

A Prayer for 5,700 Indigenous
Ancestors Buried in the
Cemetery at the Mission Dolores

Outdoor Dance Performances

Tobacco Ceremony

Candlelight Procession

Large Scale Video Projection

Artists and Culture Bearers:
Kanyon Coyote Woman (Ohlone Mutsun)
Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe -
- Hummaya singers and Dancers
Gregg Castro (Ohlone Ramaytush)
Violeta Luna (US/MX)
Kevin Gaytan (MX/US)
Mariana Sobral (Argentina/US)
FLACC Community Dancers
Mission High School Art Students

Muralists:
Adrian Arias (Peru/US)
Pancho Peskador (Chile/US)
Video Projection:
Ben Wood (England/US)

More Info: flaccdanza.org
Tickets: flacc2021.eventbrite.com

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SAN FRANCISCO DANCE
FILM FESTIVAL

IN SELECT
THEATERS &
STREAMING ON
MARQUEE TV

OCTOBER 15-24, 2021

True Sound Facade, Laura N-Tamara

Coppelia

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MIXED SHORTS

BLACK
MAGIC

BAY
AREA
SHORTS

AILEY

ISOLATION
TO CREATION

CAN YOU BRING IT
BILL T. JONES
AND D-MAN IN THE WATERS

RAISING
VOICES
2021

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HEALS
MIXED SHORTS

LEAVING LEGACIES
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SHORT
-N-
SWEET
SHORT DANCE FILMS

INTO THE WILD
SHORTS PROGRAM

EXPERIMENTAL
EXPERIMENTAL SHORTS

THE
NEXT
STAGE
SHORTS PROGRAM

SCREENSCAPES
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