



SPRING 2022

# indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.08 we done/come home



P.46 Baby Baby, Come on Home



P.52 Love letter for the heart



## MEMBERSHIP

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

Dancers' Group has evolved the paid tiered membership program to a fee-free model.

If you're interested in becoming a new member, consider joining at our free Community level.

Visit [dancersgroup.org](https://dancersgroup.org) for more information and resources.

JOIN

[dancersgroup.org](https://dancersgroup.org)

## SUBMIT

### Performances to the Community Calendar

Dancers' Group promotes performance listings in our online performance calendar and our emails to over 1,700 members.

### Resources and Opportunities

Dancers' Group sends its members a variety of emails that include recent community notices, artistic opportunities, grant deadlines, local news, and more.

### DANCERS' GROUP

Artist Administrator  
[Wayne Hazzard](#)

Artist Resource Manager  
[Andréa Spearman](#)

Administrative Assistants  
[Shellie Jew](#)  
[Anna Gichan](#)  
[Danielle Vigil](#)

Bookkeeper  
Michele Simon

Design  
Sharon Anderson

Cover photo by Jessica Swanson

PHOTO BY LARA KAUR

# WELCOME

by [BHUMI PATEL](#), Guest Editor



**RECENTLY, I'VE BEEN OBSESSED WITH HOME.** The obsession runs deep through my veins. In thinking about why I've come to this, I think about temporarily living in a new place away from my home of seven years; about the ways in which many of us are tentatively making our way back into the world after being home for two years; about my long standing interest in digging into the ongoing practice of making my body the home I have always looked for, connecting both with ancestors and futures. Finding and

re-finding home in our disoriented states comes through in the articles for this issue.

In the "before times," physical home was my soft landing place after a day of driving from gig to gig. It was the place where I made dinner and had tea parties with friends. It was somewhere that I spent little, but meaningful, time. This small, second-floor apartment in Oakland is the place I've lived the longest since childhood, and soon, it'll be a place that I lived longer than the house in which I grew up.

As a queer person, I feel how fraught our relationships to home can be. For many of us, coming out led to questions about where home might be after that moment of potential rupture. Which is not to equate queerness to suffering, but rather to understand how challenging the dominant narrative can leave us with many questions. As a person who didn't grow up in the Bay, I feel the deep connection that some of the writers in this issue express in their works about the Bay Area as home. As a person of color, I am deeply invested in the home-space necessary for BIPOC that many touch on. As someone who exists at many intersections, I often think about how to do "the work" from what bell hooks refers to as homeplace: "the one site where one can freely confront the issue of humanization, where one can resist."

In developing my own pedagogy and style of teaching improvisation, I keep coming back to queer improv and wondering what it means to queer (as a verb) and make home in the practice of improvisation. The lines between my teaching, writing, dancing, and choreographing overlap and intersect in a queer, decolonial praxis, and so it felt fitting to ask a wonderful group of queer writers to contribute to this issue. In the rebirth of Spring, I am reminded of the myriad ways we can consider home, how we find our way there, and why it matters.

I make this offering of an issue considering home so that we all might think about what home means, so that queer voices are highlighted not just in June of each year, and so that we all might begin considering our bodies, our practices, and our spaces as our homes.

Theresa Harlan writes "Our ancestors, the beloveds, are calling to us, and we call back, 'We are coming home.'"

Let us listen to that call to come home.

With love and gratitude,

*Bhumi Patel*

# CONTENTS



**8/ we done/come home: a ritual prayer for belonging**  
by *amara tabor-smith*

**16/ Family in Site**  
by *Melecio Estrella*

**22/ root my body grew**  
by *Jasmine Hearn*

**24/ Being a Body**  
by *KJ Dahlaw*

**26/ dancing close to home**  
by *Emma Tome*

**32/ Learning to Dance**  
Or When Lessons on Transformation are Lessons on Belonging  
by *Hannah Meleokaiao Ayasse*

**36/ 10 in 10**  
with Sir JoQ  
by *Andréa Spearman*

**36/ In Conversation**  
Andréa Spearman chats with Melecio Estrella

**38/ A Love Letter to San Francisco**  
A dancer's understanding of home  
by *Jesse Escalante*

**42/ given, found, finding, making, re-making, finding again**  
by *Nina Wu*

**46/ Baby Baby, Come on Home**  
by *Zoe Huey*

**52/ to remain empty at all times, an effervescent palimpsest (or love letter) for the heart**  
by *Estrellx Supernova*

**64/ In Community**  
Highlights and resources, activities and celebrations for our community—find more on [dancersgroup.org](https://dancersgroup.org)

Dancers' Group gratefully acknowledges the support of Bernard Osher Foundation, California Arts Council, Fleishhacker Foundation, Grants for the Arts, JB Berland Foundation, Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Koret Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Walter & Elise Haas Fund, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation and generous individuals.





# JOIN

## DANCERS' GROUP

### LEARN ABOUT

- Free events
- Featured artists and news
- Discounts
- Jobs
- Grants



BECOME A  
MEMBER!  
[dancersgroup.org](https://dancersgroup.org)



PHOTO BY PAK HAN



James Graham  
Dance Theatre

10TH ANNUAL

# DANCE LOVERS

DUETS BY COUPLES, CRUSHES & COMRADES

THU MAY 5 8PM  
FRI MAY 6 8PM  
SAT MAY 7 8PM

YITING (GAMA) HSU & HIEN HUYNH  
SANSAN KWAN & LENORA LEE  
ALEX MOK & ELISE SANDE-KERBACK  
ADRIENNE ZILUCA & VISHAL KUMAR  
ROSIE UENG & JAMES GRAHAM  
...AND MORE

TIX \$20-40

[TINYURL.COM/DANCELOVERS2022](https://tinyurl.com/dancelovers2022)

JOE GOODE ANNEX  
401 ALABAMA ST, SF



PHOTO: ROBBIE SWEENEY





\*\*\*\*\*

# Gravity Access Services

Audio Description for  
Dance & Theater  
Live, Recorded,  
In-Person or Online

**Make your next event  
(or video archive) more  
accessible for  
everyone:**

[www.jesscurtisgravity.org/access](http://www.jesscurtisgravity.org/access)

\*\*\*\*\*

dancersgroup  unity strength empathy



# UNEARTHED

Untold stories of the Ramayana



Directed by Amit Patel & Ishika Seth

APRIL 22nd & 23rd, 8pm

ODC Theater, 3153 17th St  
San Francisco, CA 94110

Tickets: [odc.dance/unearthed](https://odc.dance/unearthed)  
Stay updated on instagram @unearthed.show

# sjDANCECO

Join us for our  
**20TH ANNUAL  
SPRING DANCE FESTIVAL**  
at Eastridge

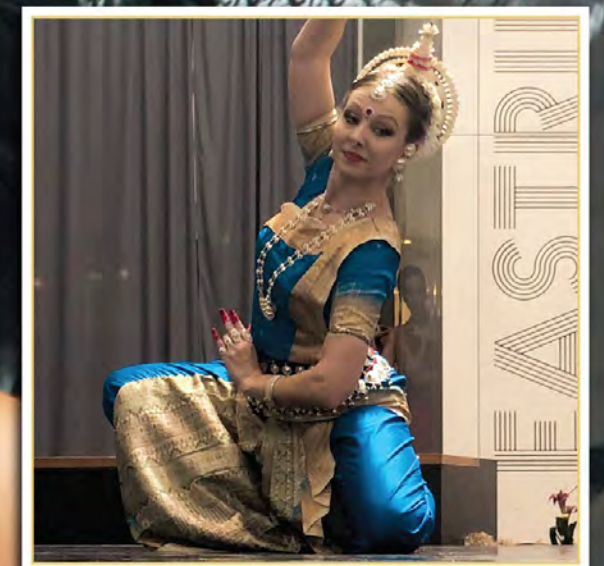
Saturday & Sunday  
April 23 & 24  
11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Professional  
Hours:  
Noon to 1 p.m.  
& 5 to 6 p.m.

Classes:  
11 a.m.  
1, 2 & 5 p.m.



For details and an event  
schedule visit [sjdanceco.org](https://sjdanceco.org)





# we done/come home: a ritual prayer for belonging



PHOTOS BY: (OPPOSITE PAGE) ROBBIE SWEENEY, (RIGHT) BETHANY HINES

by amara tabor-smith

dear reader,

throughout this writing i offer invitations and suggestions for how you might experience this offering beyond the page. it is intended to call the spirit of home close to you as you read. take the time to decide how you will read it, and i encourage you to stick to it. make space to move where you are invited to do so, and have a notebook/journal nearby to write when invited to do so or whenever you feel like it.



also, throughout this writing, i will be using the word family both as family in our broader understanding of the word, and family as a replacement for the word “community” which has been so heavily commodified that it has lost its meaning.

lastly, if you are able, play the suggested music track at the start of each section. if it ends before you finish the section, i encourage you to play it again or to choose any other music that feels right. (shout out to Bhumi for supporting this offering).

ready?  
here we go.



## 1 | home(land)



TRACK: “**Celestial Dance**”  
Kahil El’Zabar’s Ritual Trio

SOUND DESCRIPTION: The instrumental music is warm and gentle, as if a stringed instrument and a steel drum are being played in a damp, lush rainforest

get comfortable. if it is available to you, have something warm to drink. go get it now. you have time.

“...any land loss is a cultural loss.

Our lands hold our memories, our histories, our identities. When we visit our lands, our elders walk us through them, and they share oral stories that have been passed down to them. So when we’re experiencing land loss, we’re also experiencing the loss of stories, connections, and historical accounts...”

—DR. JESSICA HERNANDEZ, transnational Indigenous scholar, scientist, and community advocate

take a moment to remember/acknowledge the ancestors of the land that you call home in this moment, understanding that land acknowledgments can be problematic. they must be thought of as a means and not an end in our support of indigenous land rematriation. i invite you to treat this moment as your pledge to figure out what your role is in supporting the rematriation of colonized/stolen land back to indigenous people. perhaps start by donating to [one of these indigenous orgs.](#)

take a moment to acknowledge the ancestors and living BIPOC relatives whose unseen and unacknowledged love, labor, and stewardship of the land you are on made/makes it possible for you to be where you are right now. if this invitation feels any kind of ways complicated, uncomfortable or annoying, just stay with it for a moment.

what is it bringing up for you right now?

take a moment and move your body to the music in any kind of way that is available to you.

go ahead now. stop reading for a moment and just move to the music.

did you move? if so, take a moment to write anything that came up. no more than a page.

then set it aside and take a few breaths. if the music is over, keep reading.

if not, don’t continue reading until the song is over. just sip your warm drink.

“It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance.”

— BELL HOOKS

*We laid side by side  
Staring into the dark night  
We had bundles  
We had seeds  
We had nothing  
When we left home long ago*

i’ve been engaged in a deep inquiry with the notion of “home” and place making since ellen sebastian chang and i embarked on a creative journey almost 7 years ago with a group of black women in what became “House/Full of Blackwomen”. this project has been an episodic journey. a series of performance rituals



in public and private sites and spaces throughout oakland that have been propelled by the need to address the displacement, well being, and sex-trafficking of black women and girls in oakland through collective rituals masking as performance.

director ellen sebastian chang and i along with a group of black women artists and abolitionists started this project in 2015 sitting around a table, guided by the question, “How do we as black women, girls, and gender fluid folks find space to breathe, rest and be well in a stable home?”

sitting around that table in the house of one of the women in this project, we shared stories of how we are continuing to call oakland/bay area home through our exhaustion, anxiety, laughter, rage, hope, doubt and creativity. processing the ancestral wounds of our historical experience of displacement as black/african americans and continental africans became part of our ritual process. we came to understand that without regular attention to these wounds, we cannot holistically address the present struggles that we navigate to keep calling oakland home. the wounds of our historic experiences with displacement, violence, exodus,

PHOTO BY ROBIE SWEENEY

genocide, and forced migration are reopened for us everytime we are displaced out of our homes, everytime a beloved is displaced away from our *family*, and this has devastated our *families* throughout oakland and the bay area, destroying the cultural eco-system that has drawn many to live here in the first place. prioritizing our collective well being as fundamental to our creative process in this project over the production of art, has been a radical refusal of what bell hooks termed, “imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy”. and this is how we chart our way forward home.

## 2 | home body



TRACK: “**Les Fleurs**”  
Minnie Ripperton

SOUND DESCRIPTION: a 1970 r&b song whose lyrics and instruments encompass the openness and “free love” mantra of the time period. One could imagine resting or dancing in a field of flowers while listening.

**INVITATION:** when you finish reading this section, do a free write or poem on memories of growing up. it might bring up difficult feelings or fond memories. stay with it for at least one page. play this track on repeat or choose one that reminds you of your adoles-



cence. if it feels right, call the name of an ancestor (blood or chosen) who helped make your memory of home joyous or helped you survive it. whisper their name and thank them.

i was born and raised in san francisco. the home i grew up in was complex. throughout my teen years, following my parent’s divorce, i lived with my mother in a flat on castro street. it was a dysfunctional place of love, addiction, black feminist parenting, depression, support, economic struggle as well as being a gathering point for family and *family*. it was a place of refuge, and also a place where i experienced emotional neglect, where my mother in regular fits of rage and despair would scream that at any point we could end up homeless and that she didn’t know

if she wanted to live anymore. it was also a place where i knew my budding identity as an artist, as a queer teenager was accepted lovingly and without hesitation.

our home was shared at various times with cousins, relatives, friends of siblings, and where even my mother’s hairdresser and his boyfriend lived with us for a time. our house was always full of music, loud conversations, arguments and pot-luck meals. this experience taught me how to live collectively with others. it shaped my value for *family* interdependence. it also taught me about the harm of codependency and codependent relationships but that is a story for another article.

though i lived in new york on several different occasions through the years, i would always gravitate back home to the bay. when the assault of hyper gentrification in the late 90s priced me and most of my *family* out of san francisco, i moved to oakland where there was a thriving queer BIPOC *family* and

no shortage of house parties, festivals, and underground spaces. almost every night there were djs spinning in clubs throughout the town where we were welcome. oakland is where i found my spiritual family and came into my spiritual practice in the Yoruba Lukumí tradition. many of us felt like oakland would always be ours, that what happened to san francisco could not happen here. and then i noticed realtors starting to buy up property in the lower bottoms (west oakland) and advertising it as “east san francisco.” i watched friends, my own sister and many oakland family members lose their homes, victims of predatory lending in the early and mid 2000s. the writing was always on the wall, many of us (myself included) were just too naive to see it, were in denial or didn’t believe we had the power to do anything about it.

### 3 | when it hits home

**TRACK: “Grow” FaceSoul**  
SOUND DESCRIPTION: an acapella song composed of multiple layers of a male voice both humming and singing with a deep timber and passionate spirit.

**INVITATION:** before reading on, put the music track on repeat or have another track of your choosing that moves you to follow while reading this section.

go to a place in your mind that felt like home but no longer exists, no longer available to you or no longer feels like home. close your eyes and see it for a moment before reading on.

what about it felt like home to you? did you ever grieve this loss? can you locate where you feel this loss in your body?

if it is possible, rock or shift that part of your body and try to keep reading

you are encouraged to moan and/or cry if needed. stay with these feelings if you can.

take a few deep breaths before reading on.

**breathe...breathe...breathe**  
*Suspend we notions of time*  
*We can’t keep track of that here*  
*In this place*  
*Dis’place*  
*There is only the breath of the middle*  
*In*  
*Out*  
*In*  
*Out*  
*Motion*  
*And stillness*  
*Should we fight?*  
*Or should we go?*

*House/Full of Blackwomen* as a project will come to a close with a final episode titled, “this too shall pass” in february 2023. when we gathered around that table in 2015, all of us either lived in oakland or in the surrounding bay area. since that time, some of us no longer live here. some of us were displaced. some got weary from the never-ending survival hustle that it takes to stay here and moved out of state.

ellen, my collaborator and mentor, was the first to go. priced out of the west oakland home she shared with her husband and daughter, and then displaced from the west oakland space where they had a family restaurant that they created called, FuseBox which was a home joint for so many of our oakland *family*.

since that first gathering, we have watched oakland continue down the same path of violent gentrification that happened in san francisco more than 20 years ago, creating a 47% rise in the unhoused population since 2017, many of whom were formerly

housed folks born and raised in oakland. those figures may be even higher due to the covid. this has weighed heavy on our hearts, especially during this never-ending pandemic, and we find ourselves even in this moment continuing to navigate tremendous loss: jobs, housing, and the deaths of *family* and family members.

when house/full member and Boom Shake co-founder monica hastings-smith passed from cancer last year, after being diagnosed a year earlier, we all went into survival mode. taking pause and struggling to find each other during pandemic isolation. trying to move through grief in our own ways. trying to take pause to grieve while the grief continued rolling like a river.

**please stop reading and take a moment to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths before continuing on. this would be a good time to rock and/or hum while you breathe. again, take your sweet sweet time with this before you continue reading.**

*House/full of Blackwomen table gatherings over zoom*  
*trying to see each other*  
*through the blur of screen-weary eyes*  
*our connection unstable*  
*no one to offer you water or sit next to you and hold your hand when you are sobbing*

*there is only the breath of the middle*  
*in*  
*out*  
*in*  
*out...*  
*how do we recover place*  
*and belonging in this bewildered time?*  
*in*  
*out*  
*in*  
*out.....*  
stillness

### 4 | know place like home

**TRACK: “Black Folk” Tank and the Bangas**  
SOUND DESCRIPTION: a jazzy neo-soul mid-tempo song that illustrates the Black experience, joy and pain, through lyrics and spoken word.

**INVITATION:** ok, now we need to shift this energy. please do not read on without taking a moment to dance to this track. maybe you dance to the whole thing before reading on. no matter if you are black or not, dance to this track as a ritual for black and BIPOC homefullness, for our collective recovery from imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. afterward drink water and stretch your body a little before reading on.

**“There’s no place like home”**  
— DOROTHY AFTER WYTCH GLENDA  
REMINDED SHE/THEM THAT SHE/THEM DIDN’T NEED NO FUCKIN’ WHITE MALE PATRIARCHY TO GET HER/THEM HOME. THE POWER WAS ALWAYS WITHIN HER/THEM. THAT YOUNG WYTCH JUST HAD TO BE REMINDED TO CLICK THEM HEELS.

**“Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.”**  
— BELL HOOKS

i will not end this on a note of pessimism. i cannot. i know better. nothing is certain, especially not now. and that

is nothing new. what i know is we must keep doing the collective work of repairing our relationship to each other and this earth called home. we must do this work not because we know we will survive displacement/ climate catastrophe/race and gender violence/covid/the tyrannies of man’s war but because if we don’t, we surely will not survive.

i have been rethinking home as not necessarily connected to a particular physical structure or place (though that too is important) but home as a spirit of belonging that holds us wherever we are. a state of being and being well. an interdependent web of *family* connections. connections like underground tree root systems, connected systems that we can lean into, love in to, heal with, and transmute this hell of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy and beckon a black indigenous queer eco feminist NOW.

and how do we co-create communal safe spaces so our *families* have places to land on our nomadic journey?

to do so we must engage in the emotional and ancestral healing work so that the untended wounds of **internalized racial superiority and racial inferiority** that we all carry don’t create unnecessary drama and chaos that would undermine our efforts to steward home spaces together in ways that are collectively healing.

we need each other. we have always needed each other. and we need each other now more than ever. in activist language, we talk about “struggling together” towards our liberation. but many of us don’t really know how to struggle together as a practice that is not harmful to ourselves or others. it is critical that we learn to do this now, and in ways that do not negate our rest, our joy and our pleasure in the process.



and there can be no space for “cancel culture” in this collective home making. “cancel culture” is the child of imperialism and dictatorship. we will have to be in deep evolving practices of recognizing where our racial, economic and/or gender privilege is causing harm, and then be regularly proactive in refusing such benefits or figuring out how to use these benefits to dismantle them.

paramount in this process are reparations for black and indigenous folks. we can expect that this work will not be quick, easy, nor comfortable. but it will ultimately be liberating and healing for us all.

though i feel a deep sense of belonging to the bay, it is a belonging that is not promised. and figuring out how or if i will continue to stay here is the ongoing question that i keep leaning into.

buddhism and yoruba ifaism teaches that the only constant is change. change refuses our notions of stability. leaning into the instability of change is crucial for us as queer BIPOC folks and white folks to consider in an age of an ongoing pandemic, climate catastrophe, and political and economic uncertainty. and it asks us to do this work together. we cannot move forward in hyper individualism. individualism is unsustainable and is a tool of patriarchy. divide and conquer.

if we are going to liberate “community” from the current commodified understanding, we are going to have to learn how to live mindfully interdependent with one another, as opposed to unconsciously dependent. we are going to have to re-examine how our ideas of “personal space” might be in opposition to the collective spaces we need to be cultivating now for our survival. dismantling

the imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy that bell hooks talked about cannot be done in isolation. we will all have to tend the soil where we will bury this construct that we have internalized, in hopes that it will become compost for our collective rebirth.

family, let’s be clear: these days are dark and we have to be doing the deeper work,

and we have to do this work together. we must utilize our collective “ashe” (Yoruba word meaning, “the power to make things happen”) to plant the seeds for the harvest of our renewal.

we have to come home to each other.


*we are (re) members of a (new)  
ancient tribe  
nomadic in mad space  
wanderers in this space of now  
constantly moving  
being moved  
priests  
yeyes  
survivors  
mambo of the avenues  
and boulevards  
side streets and  
freeway underpasses  
performing ceremony of discarded things  
talismans of remnant magic  
echoes of kitchens stories  
house parties  
and barber shop incantations  
bembes for eleggua  
to call the orisha who clears a way  
for divine and infinite possibility*

*summon your ancestors  
your gods  
your inner spirit  
tell them  
you want to be made ready  
remember*

*everywhere is a church  
everywhere is a temple  
everywhere is a ritual ground*

*remember  
our wounds and scars  
be oracle and compass  
our feet and hands  
be bibles and song  
so whisper softly  
your jazz prayers  
as we jump this ship  
and return home again*

#### INVITATION OUTRO:

 **TRACK: “Brilliant Mycelium”**  
**Beautiful Chorus**

SOUND DESCRIPTION: a gentle acapella song passing through hums, whispers and soft singing of nourishment and wisdom.

take a few slow deep breaths as you listen to the above track  
close out this reading  
with movement  
with prayer  
in silence  
it is your choice  
take a moment and listen  
then  
call one of your beloveds  
and arrange to meet them at a place  
where you can find your bare feet on  
some soil  
hold each other  
chanting softly, over and over  
“we will get through this together”  
and mean it.

amara tabor-smith was born in San Francisco and lives in Oakland. She is a choreographer/ performance maker and the artistic director of Deep Waters Dance Theater. She describes her work as Afro futurist Conjure Art. Her interdisciplinary site-specific and community responsive performance works utilize Yoruba Lukumí spiritual technologies to address issues of social and environmental justice, race, gender identity, and belonging. amara’s work is rooted in black, queer, feminist principles, that insist on liberation, joy, pleasure and well-being. Her current multi year project House/full of Blackwomen will conclude with the final episode, “This Too Shall Pass” in February 2023 on the streets of Oakland.

Photo by Robbie Swecny

Risa  
Jaroslow  
& Dancers

TALKING CIRCLE



Six people ages 25 to 78 gather to make a decision that will impact each of their lives. What is the freedom they long for, and what will they risk to achieve it?

May 12 – 15 & 19 – 22 at CounterPulse, San Francisco  
For tickets: [risajaroslowdance.org](https://risajaroslowdance.org) or scan the QR code





---

# FAMILY IN•SITE

---

UNEXPECTED INTERSECTIONS OF SITE  
SPECIFIC DANCE MAKING WITH  
MY FAMILY'S SAN FRANCISCO ROOTS.

I was born in San Francisco. My gigantic Filipinx family geography triangulates The Bay, Wine Country, and the Central Valley. Ohlone, Miwok, Southern Pomo, and Yokut Lands. Site specifically, I am Golden Gate fog, I am oak savannah with the stench of Petaluma fertilizer season, I am crates of asparagus and bing cherries in the matter-of-fact heat of Stockton. My friends Damara and Patricia at the Joe Goode Performance Group have been dance-talking with me about belonging lately. How do we belong to the body? How does the body belong to a place?

My first show with Joe Goode was in 2004 – “Hometown.” While having my shy, young dancer body tossed around by fellow JGPG members Liz Burritt, Felipe Barrueto-Cabello, Marit Brooke-Kothlow and Rachael Lincoln, Joe drew me out of myself and into myself at the same time – as Joe Goode does. He choreographed a palm sweaty moment for me to crawl into the orchestra pit of YBCA, alone out there to sing a song with a picket fence encircling my ribcage. Singing is a root in my family culture – my father is a singer, his mother was a singer, her mother...

---

BY MELECIO ESTRELLA | PHOTO BY JESSICA SWANSON





Now at YBCA my Auntie Linda was sitting in the front row, 4 feet away. Layers of memory wrap me while I sing to her. When we were little, my dad used to have us sing for Auntie Linda in our living room. And now here I am in a Hometown picket fence spotlight looking into her eyes while I sing...

*“The only hometown I care about is hidden  
Hidden away from the hard outside  
It’s soft, this hometown is soft  
Away from the hard outside...”*

The Bay is my hometown, my refuge, my family, my body.

Fort Mason has a special sort of foggy ephemerality. Dances articulate over tidal flows in historic military structures, fed by pricey marina food, artists buoyed by resident arts organizations. In 2013, Amelia Rudolph and Rachael Lincoln led our company, BANDALOOP, in “Harboring” in the Festival Pavilion there. “Harboring” is a vertical dance work that considers embarkation and movement at the threshold of land and sea. My mother and her 3 sisters volunteered to help at the show. They are all true San Franciscans, a complex and hilarious sisterhood of Filipina Americanness – honored elders who would stay up all night playing mah jong and smoking cigarettes together. As a child in the ‘80s, I used to love watching Auntie Linda roll ladies’ hair up in curlers in her salon across the street from Fort Mason, the sharp smell of perm chemicals burning hair into new shapes. Auntie Gina lives in the Richmond in a house that has belonged to her husband’s parents since the 1920s. She is an origami expert, and a die-hard Giants fan. Auntie Panching lived in Cole Valley, the kindest woman I know, deeply devoted to her catholic faith – she will pray with cloistered nuns for six hours straight. When they all showed up with my mom to volunteer at “Harboring,” Auntie Panching

pointed to the dock next to the pavilion where we stood and said, “That is where we got off the boat.” My eyes widened as I learned, after months of rehearsal and preparation at that dock, that this was the very site of my mother’s immigration in 1948. Harboring, disembarkation, thresholds...How do we belong to a place, when we migrate, we move, when war tears through and sends us across an ocean? Harboring.

My grandfather, Col. Melecio M. Santos rode a military vessel for 30 days with 8 kids to San Francisco after World War II. He was war rattled, decorated, a widower, and honored by the US Army. Upon immigration he was posted as Commanding Officer of Forts Baker, Kronkite, and Barry on the north

**I called my mom to chat and let her know what we were doing, and she said, “Oh Fort Barry... that was where our first house was after we got off the boat.”**

end of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The Headlands Center for the Arts occupies the historic buildings of Fort Barry, close enough to hear the waves hit shore in the distance. Coast Miwok Lands and protected National Seashore Area, its longtime residents are Coyote, Owl, Hawk, Monterey Cypress, and Eucalyptus. In 2018, my husband Andy, a climate researcher at UC Berkeley, collaborated with Headlands to organize a thematic residency on climate change and equity. This residency brought together scientists, environmental justice workers, artists, and policy strategists working in the climate space to live together, share work, and seed collaborations. I was fortunate to be invited to share the work of Fog Beast. This led to a three-month residency for Fog Beast to create a shoreline-based work, “These Lines Are Living,” in collaboration with Andy and shoreline geologist Dave Reid. We made

the work in a series of retreats dancing on the shore, and we brought our families with us. Our kids played in the hills and climbed on driftwood on the beach, conducting the most pure site specific research.

I called my mom to chat and let her know what we were doing, and she said, “Oh Fort Barry... that was where our first house was after we got off the boat.” I didn’t realize that as the Colonel’s daughter, my mother’s earliest experiences of America were of playing in those hills, sneaking around Building 944 that is now the heart of Headlands Center for the Arts, and living in the house that is now occupied by Headlands’ Executive Director, Mari Robles. Seventy years after my mother resided at Fort Barry, I was in artistic residence there,

rolling on the wood floors, singing to the walls and hiking to the shore with my five year old son. As Fog Beast danced on the shifting sands of Rodeo Beach, my mom shared her memory of that site – fresh off the boat, a five year old herself on that same beach, a wave pulled her small body into the ocean, she panicked, almost drowned and was thankfully rescued by her older brother. These Lines are Living.

Both my parents grew up in San Francisco. After they lived in military housing, my mother’s family moved to the Upper Haight. My dad grew up in a house near Duboce Park. In sixth grade she took dance lessons from Rita Hayworth’s Aunt on Geary St. He played in a Filipino basketball league. They first met at Park Bowl Bowling Alley on Haight Street, what is now Amoeba Records. Looking for their first apartment together, they were turned down by landlords who stated honestly, “We don’t rent to

Filipinos.” They eventually had 9 kids. I am number 8. My dad has 7 siblings. My mom has 15. With all the cousins and grandkids, we can fill a theater. We are more likely to fill a church.

Andy and I got married in 2010. It wasn’t legal then, but we did it anyway: for ourselves and our people. Six months before our wedding the brilliant Erika Chong Shuch crafted an expansive project called “Love Everywhere” – a series of site specific installations bringing visibility to the ongoing struggle of marriage equality. I jumped at the chance to work with Erika and the big, colorful cast she brought together. The heart of “Love Everywhere” was a big production in the Rotunda of SF City Hall. This majestic space was animated by a cast of about 40

of us, dancing, singing, performing to lyrics made from real folks’ wedding vows. My parents came to the event, and my mom said, “You know your dad’s dad (my grandfather) used to be a head janitor here? Your dad’s first job was helping him mop these floors.” I looked at my dad as he stood on the shiny marble floors with my head tilted in puzzlement as he nodded in affirmation. Since that moment, thanks to the Dancers’ Group Rotunda Series, I have been in the swirl of many dance artists at City Hall, the place my grandfather cared for as a Janitor until his retirement in 1983. Thirty years later in 2013, in the presence of my parents, we had our second wedding. My husband and I signed some papers, said some vows, and shed some tears on those

floors. Those floors that held the rituals of performance, the rituals of marriage, and the rituals of labor of a working class Filipino family man. Love Everywhere.

In 2021 Joe Goode invited me to co-direct “Time of Change” in the Haight, my mom’s neighborhood. Joe and I collaborated with Oyster Knife (Chibueze Crouch and Gabriele Christian) on the show. We were looking at the hippie movement, asking “who was it really for?” And “what happened to the Black and Filipinx folks who were there before?” As we were dreaming up the work, we walked around the neighborhood together to visit possible sites. One site we were considering that day was St. Agnes Church, and it ended up being a core site in “Time of Change.” I had vague memories of that church, so I texted my mom to get



PHOTO BY TONY NGUYEN





One of the gifts I carry forward from the many years of working with Joe Goode is the embodied knowing that my artistic practice in the drama of show making exists in this landscape of impermanence.

more specific - “Are we connected to St. Agnes Church?” She replied “I went to grammar school there, your father and I were married there, your older sister and brother were baptized there, Uncle Bino’s funeral was there, and you were a ring bearer at a wedding there in 1984.” When we went inside to meet the Jesuit priests of the church, we sat in a back room that I eerily recognized. I had been in that room as a 5 year old in a wedding tuxedo, 37 years earlier.

Because of the pandemic, we were conducting rehearsals outdoors. We cultivated our dances at Hippie Hill in Golden Gate Park. From Hippie Hill, I could see the patch of grass where my family had a living wake picnic with my Uncle Bill before he died in 1993.

He was the uncle who lived in his VW bus and would show up at our house, help with landscaping, teach me guitar, laugh a lot, and then leave. We also made some dances in the sacred spaces of the AIDS Memorial Grove, the only place in San Francisco where it is legal to scatter ashes of loved ones. One of the gifts I carry forward from the many years of working with Joe Goode is the embodied knowing that my artistic practice in the drama of show making exists in this landscape of impermanence. Dances come and dances go. We are always in a Time of Change.

These intersections with my family pathway have brought magic and meaning to the dry words – “site-specific.” I wasn’t at all aiming

to make dances at sites of familial resonance, they came through a hap-penstance ecology of collaborative artistic dreaming, venue seeking and availability, funding alignments, and mystery. I’m still puzzled by it, and probably always will be. I’m okay with not knowing – and I am okay to keep asking – How do I belong to this body? How does this body belong to a place? I give thanks to the land and collaborators that make these questions askable.

**MELECIO ESTRELLA** is a director, choreographer, educator and facilitator based in unceded Chechenyo Ohlone territory. He is artistic director of BANDALOOP, co-director of Fog Beast and longtime member of the Joe Goode Performance Group. He has had three premiers of full length work in 2021: *LOOM:FIELD* in Atlanta, GA, *Transpire* in Boise, ID, and *Time of Change* in San Francisco. Upcoming 2022 engagements include BANDALOOP’s 30th Anniversary Home Season in Oakland, new work at The Virginia Arts Festival in Norfolk, VA, LAPublicCanvas at the Ford Theater in Los Angeles, and These Lines are Living at the Animate Dance Festival in Alameda. IG: [@bandalooping](#) [@fogbeast](#)

PHOTO BY MATT HABER



# innerspace : HOMECOMING ART PARTY & AUCTION

saturday may 7th • 7pm - midnight

@ counterpulse • 80 turk st, sf

[counterpulse.org/innerspace2022](https://counterpulse.org/innerspace2022)



# Root my body grew

Text, photos, and illustrations by Jasmine Hearn

This is an imagined and remembered illustrated poem that is composed of sketches and poetics from my recent process journals. The photo is from a recent flight into occupied lands now known as Houston, TX. Root my body grew is in conversation with the upcoming archival and performance project, *Memory Fleet: A Return to Matr* due to premiere in Houston, TX April 2024.

It references non-linear conversations I have had with [Marjani Forté-Saunders](#), [Marlies Yearby](#), [Jo Stewart](#), [Jennifer Harge](#), [Byronné Hearn](#), [Jenna Hearn](#), [Myssi Robinson](#), [Alisha B. Wormsley](#), [Bennalldre Williams](#), [FreWuhn](#), [Victor Le Givens](#), [Urban Bush Women](#), [Li Harris](#), [Lovie Olivia](#), [dani tirrell](#), [Barbara Mahler](#), and [Athena Kokoronis](#) of [Domestic Performance Agency](#).



the way I understand

is to say yes to fear  
and all that fear brings

I have been forgetting the left side  
the bobbling knee and the ill- situated  
sits bone

I have been moving myself away from  
itself  
easy  
hold on tight and loose lost loose luc  
sensation sin sensation

like a cliff that crumbled into the  
ocean a part of what is no longer held

tectonics keep moving keep  
kept and then shaken/shared

I have been saying yes to the fear of an  
uterus the size of a hen  
full of inescapable fluid

and a trail of migrating blood in  
between my feet while walking

emptiness in-between bladder and  
colon  
in- between organs  
does that did that would that hopefully  
not will not  
the space collapse?

did the space collapse?  
did the church close?  
the coordinates empty?  
a disappearance a missing and inevita-  
bly a forgetting

why do i forget almost every month  
since fourth grade the acute pain of  
the descending space too full for feel-  
ing the exact coordinates of (you) joy  
and grief



JASMINE HEARN was born and raised on occupied lands now known as Houston, TX. They are an interdisciplinary artist, director, choreographer, organizer, teaching artist, and a 2017 and 2021 Bessie awarded performer. Jasmine’s commitment to dance is an expansive practice that includes performance, collaboration, and memory-keeping.



this is question of where the stars are  
over the church steeple  
church as mother  
building as mother  
structure as womb as cave as forever  
home

mother can rule her own

is this really a story about the differ-  
ence between violence and care

or reading tension  
or receiving the frequency of vulner-  
ability and it is on all the time with  
every person

energetic body  
i assumed  
you to have healed yourself

even if its plugged with stagnant  
highly packed fluid  
stirring  
and pulling up towards the stars

whined and unwind  
varying levels of intimacy  
with a distinct palate to what got  
calloused and what hurts and what  
tastes good.

pushdance.org

HIP HOP  
ARTIST  
RESIDENCY &  
TRAINING

MAY  
14  
3PM/6PM

FINAL PRESENTATION  
BAYVIEW OPERA HOUSE

8 RESIDENT ARTISTS  
3 DANCERS, 3 MUSICIANS & 2 VISUAL ARTISTS  
ALL HIP HOP ARTISTS PERFORM ON 1 STAGE

PU SH ZACCHO DANCE THEATRE DREAM KEEPER



# being a BODY



by KJ DAHLAW

**I**'VE BEEN THINKING A LOT ABOUT THE BODY. My body. Our body. The ways that we are a body together. We, the SF Bay dance community, and more broadly, as a human community. I'm interested in our bodiedness.

It's interesting, right? We're living through this time of radical wealth disparity, global pandemic, deep fissure between the right and the left and it all lives in our bodies. Our bodies are dynamically connected to each other and the ecosystem of which we are part. We are in relationship to each other. The needs, desires, rights, dignity of all of us is related to each of us.

I come from a lineage of Western contemporary dance, modern dance, and classical ballet. I love how I can feel my teachers in my dancing body. (The wisdom, craft, and techniques as well as the patterns of dominance.) I love to dance. My body loves dancing. Dance feels like this space where I get to transcend. It gives me such deep pleasure, it's all I want to do.

But, you know what's hard on my body? Working as a dance artist in the Bay area. I'm a freelance dance artist, dancer/choreographer/teacher, living in the East Bay: Richmond, CA. My name is KJ Dahlaw and I'm a queer, non-binary trans dance artist and parent of 2. It should come as no surprise to read that it is hard to survive as a dance artist in the Bay area. Jobs in dance don't often pay living wages, nor are they stable. Our field has been hit particularly hard by the limitations of the pandemic too, which results in less work. I currently have 7 jobs, a mixture of W2 employment and 1099 contract work. I recognize my privilege in having these jobs and it's incredibly difficult for my own body to hold so much while raising kids and managing my own anxiety disorder and C-PTSD. Just being real.

I want to talk about the ways in which we are interconnected and how our health and wellness inside of our communities is in relationship to the health and wellness of all. We are a body. In this context, I do want to discuss the SF Bay area dance community as a body. The field of dance is in and of the work of the body. Dance emerges from the body. We possess quite a depth of knowledge about the body and

even pathways of healing and repair with the body. How are we as a dance community accountable to one another?

I bring up community accountability because there is no overarching infrastructure in the field of dance, locally or globally, to which we are accountable. Being an accountable community means taking responsibility for our choices and the consequences of our choices\*. How can we be a more accountable community in the face of rampant dancer underemployment, job/financial instability, lack of access to adequate healthcare, and seeking justice when abuse is called out in our field?

The field of dance is in a period of much needed change. Dancers, who were trained to be obedient and unquestioning of authority, are starting to demand rights. Dance patterns the body. Western concert dance training, ballet in particular but extending into modern and contemporary dance, orients the body towards dominance. In the sense that there is a tradition of teaching and directing dance with required obedience to authority, use of negative reinforcement (i.e. verbal abuse, beratement, body shaming) as means of motivation, and relentless repetition of form. I keep thinking about the ways that the ballet and modern dance training that is patterned into my body, relate to my sense of agency. On a larger scale, I think about the ways this patterning relates to our bodiedness as a dance community.

When we train dancers to blindly obey their teachers/directors, we are not honoring the agency of our dancers. When we train dancers to expect to be touched without their consent, we are not honoring the agency of our dancers. When we train dancers to accept and to be grateful for any kind of dance work, regardless of the value of their labor, we create a body of dancers who do not understand their own worth or value and to accept poverty as a part of the gig. This is a problem because along with the internalized lack of agency and consent plus impoverishment, dancers also are hesitant to speak up when abuse happens in our field.

There was an allegation of abuse in the SF Bay dance community in the summer of 2020 that was handled very poorly, in my opinion. Rupture happened when no process of community accountability, conversation and healing tended to the wound. It felt like neither the dance organization where the alleged abuse occurred nor the SF Bay Area dance community at large was able to hold this rupture in our collective body with dignity. The dancer making the accusation is a beloved member of our community, an exquisite dancer, and a dynamic, thoughtful teacher. Now, they feel unsafe to be in SF dance spaces. This particular situation feels relevant to examine as we contemplate our bodiedness as a dance community. This is a wound in our body that has been left unhealed.

I am working with an injury in my own body right now. It's my left knee. It's been really emotional for me to sustain an injury. I just turned 41. This injury is literally just from

overuse. Overuse of my body. Huh. That tracks. My survival literally depends on my body and my ability to dance and teach dance. Learning to slow down and honor the limitations of my body is good work for me but not easy. My body is certainly my teacher in a new way. As much as I'd like to, I can't muscle my way through this. I can't ignore this injury. I can, however, listen to my body and change how I work. We can learn so much from our bodies.

We are a body. We are a body that can create great beauty, transcendence even. We are a body that can make change in this world. We are a body in full frailty, resilience, and vulnerability. We are a body that can change, adapt and heal. We know from experience with countless injuries in the body, that we cannot heal through bypassing and erasing harm. When parts of our body are in pain, do we not stop and tend to pain/injury/woundedness? I ask again, how are we as a dance community accountable to one another? How do we show up for the needs of the very real human dancers who embody our work?

I have my eye on the [Dance Artist National Collective](#) (DANC), a growing group of freelance dance artists organizing for action toward safe, equitable, and sustainable working conditions. As a dance teacher, I also research methods of reinforcing agency in the classroom through choice making and practicing verbal consent with touch in the studio. Likewise, I want to be available for taking responsibility for my choices and I want to trust that my community will hold me accountable for my choices. We can't be a healthy body if we are not attuned to one another and accountable to one another. I'm wondering about what kinds of structures of accountability might be useful for the SF Bay dance community in holding the wellness of the body a priority?

We are a body. We are connected to one another. We are responsible for the impact of our choices and actions in relation to one another. There is a serious way that our collective body is out of balance. I'm curious about how we can do better, how we can support one another and address the needs of dancers with dignity. Let us center our bodiedness in our practices and take leadership in community accountability because of the wisdom and knowledge of the body that we already possess. I know my own particular body is asking me to slow down, reassess how I work and take time for healing. What is our collective Body asking of us?

\* I got this definition of community accountability from this [youtube video](#) from the Barnard Center for Research on Women, who named the source of this definition from the Northwest Network.

**KJ DAHLAW** is a bay area dance artist and makes work under the name of Unruly Body Tanztheater. They hold an MFA in Dance from Saint Mary's College of CA and a BFA in Dance Performance from Northern Illinois University. KJ's work examines unruliness; queer theology; the body; and practices of counter-hegemony in the dancing body. KJ is exploring the lineage of tanztheater and has a background in ballet, modern dance, and improvisational practices.



# dancing close to home

**MY MOM LIVES ALONE**, about a thirty minute drive away, in the condo complex where my two sisters and I grew up. There's a sprawling rosemary bush out front, planted the Easter after I turned two, kept neatly shorn where it meets the sidewalk. When our phone calls started filling with concerns – about her computer's anti-virus software update, changing the smoke alarm battery, the new electricity bill – I asked my mom if she might start keeping a list, so I could come spend a Sunday afternoon each month helping check everything off. A promise I have kept, mostly.

On a recent visit, I idly asked her if I seemed taller. This was a silly question, given that I'm now in my thirties. Why did I feel such illusory largeness inside my childhood home? Why did I test our conversation with a question about my body?

Of course, here, perhaps more than anywhere else, my senses are shaped by the imprint of memory. Sometimes, home feels like a place where I need to give account, be measured. If these visits are a check on how credible my performance of adulthood might be, I usually fail by one measure or another: when I collapse on the couch, when I stuff myself too full, when I give in to bickering. But these acts make a ridiculous rubric.



story + photos by  
**Emma Tome**

I want to learn to love this nearness, and all the things that it reveals.

My older and younger sisters now both live on the east coast, and the last several months are the first time I've been the only one of us close to home. My mom is from Maryland, my stepmom is from Kansas, and my dad is from Okinawa, Japan. I grew up in Novato, sheltered by my parents' choices to leave their childhood homes – steeped in the suggestion that the place where you grow up is not where you become who you are meant to be.

I suspect that my parents attach some prestige to my sisters being far away, even if (or perhaps because) it means shelving some fears about their own mortality. Fears I try to empathize with even as I gingerly plumb the possibility of caring for them as they age: who will tend to me when my body starts to fail?

In Fog Beast's [\*The Big Reveal\*](#) (2019) – a lush, playfully dystopian dance theater reimagination of the corporate conference vernacular, a tech company (with the motto “SYN-ER-GY: SYNERGY!”) reveals their latest innovation: The Wailana (performed by Wailana Simcock), an immortal android in the Companion Series, outfitted with ambiguous ethnicity, fluent in over one hundred languages, and

programmed for perfect empathy. A more-than-human solution for all-too-human alienation.

Seeing that show was a gift of coincidence. I passed by the Asian Art Museum every day on my way home from work, and one Thursday I remembered that it was probably open late. Something felt fated when I arrived – just in time for the opening ritual, incantations echoing in the atrium, naming our ancestors and their places, knitting together eternal questions about human history, migration, and belonging.

I had recently moved back from a year in Colorado, tacking between heartbreaks and jobs. In that evening, so much of my inner searching was gently reflected, stilled. In Wailana Simcock's talk about gender, language, and land. In dance and music giving form to the exquisite contradictions our bodies endure in modern work. It all suggested that there existed some forgiving, tender network undulating through this Bay Area home-place and beyond, a place I knew, but had not always felt known to.

Sometimes I wonder if I've lingered here as someone who feels they have something to prove. Have I come back because it's easy? Because it's hard? Sometimes home feels like a place where,



gestures by  
**Randee Paufve**

despite my best efforts, I will always be a child. But if I remember the gifts of childhood – boundless play and curiosity, a way of teaching those tutored in disillusionment to see differently – this helps me weather those feelings of fraudulence, vulnerability, and those sometimes bigger emotions than a body can manage. I remember that growing up is not finding a way to outrun failure, but finding a home in one's body.

In *The Happiest Season* (2020) a closeted lesbian (Harper, played by Mackenzie Davis) brings her girlfriend (Abby, Kristen Stewart) home for Christmas, but insists on keeping their relationship a secret. (Harper treats Abby horribly; their secret gets out; Abby stays with her in the end). The film didn't garner much critical praise, and earned especially literal criticism from viewers yearning for the promised feel-good queer holiday classic. I wondered if the screenplay – conceived by Clea DuVall, based on her own life's events – was suggesting that to be queer is to be intrinsically disinterested in things being easy. Or perhaps the movie was quietly encouraging viewers to finally break up with whatever version of Harper had been lingering in their own lives.



I wish that my own “coming out” didn’t so much resemble Harper’s. At 22, I kissed my first to-be girlfriend one summer night, sitting on the sidewalk in front of my mom’s house, in front of that sprawling rosemary bush. I was staying with my mom as she was recovering from surgery (which didn’t stop her from coming out to check up on us). No sooner was I back inside than I was peppered with questions, admonitions, warnings. I don’t know why I tried to be honest with her then, when I could barely be so with myself.

Whatever process I had was circumspect, held in that container of relationship but never presented as an absolute fact. Later that summer, I moved to Okinawa, not far from where my father grew up. I never introduced my visiting girlfriend as such to anyone apart from my close friends, and eventually some trusted co-workers. I unquestioningly assumed that to make home here, to find closeness with my relatives, meant that it was essential to obscure this one vital truth.

Yet this young queerness found quiet shelter in Okinawa, too. My first “butch” haircut was a signal hidden in plain sight among all the high school girls I taught who had the same one. My work wardrobe slowly filled with colorful men’s *kariyushi* shirts. I grew devoted to Gu Ju Ryu karate, joined my neighborhood triathlon team. Movement was my way of finding home as I learned Japanese. I smiled when one of my *obasan* joked over how much more sense it would make if I were a man (or at least that’s what I thought she said).

After moving back home, moving away, moving back again, seeing *The Big Reveal* marked a new kind of homecoming. It left me with an



After moving back home, moving away, moving back again, seeing *The Big Reveal* marked a new kind of homecoming.

urgent desire to express beyond language in the way I saw those dancers could. My younger sister told me about Shawl-Anderson Dance Center, and I called the next day to see if I could enroll in Robin Nasatir’s Introduction to Modern series, though it had already begun the week prior. After the first class, I was enraptured, almost to the point of fear. How would I steward this newfound love? Would my body cooperate? Was it too late to commit to this thing I couldn’t yet fully name, but that I now felt so lucidly I was always supposed to?

Not long after I started coming to classes at Shawl-Anderson, Frank Shawl, co-founder of the studio with his partner Victor Anderson, passed away. Though I had never met him, I went to his overflowing memorial, wanting to witness his spiritual imprint. Robin urged me to leave a video message in the booth set up for remembrances. I rambled on over how grateful I felt to him and Victor, for being partners in a time when it was so hard to be so, and for making that house into a dancing home for so many.

“I have arrived, I am home.” This is a meditation offered in Thich Nhat Hanh’s Plum Village tradition, an invitation to return to the home we can always access: our bodies and breath. I think this is a dancer’s practice, too, with one crucial amendment: if the still body does not offer home, the moving body might make it so.

Early on in the pandemic, alongside so many of us, I lurched into dancing at home. At first, it was fun – I sent my family jokey dance videos, organized my grad school classmates for a home Zoom rendition of Trisha Brown’s *Roof Piece*, following the [instructions the company gave in the New York Times](#). I opened an instagram account so I could take live Cunningham classes (but never actually did).

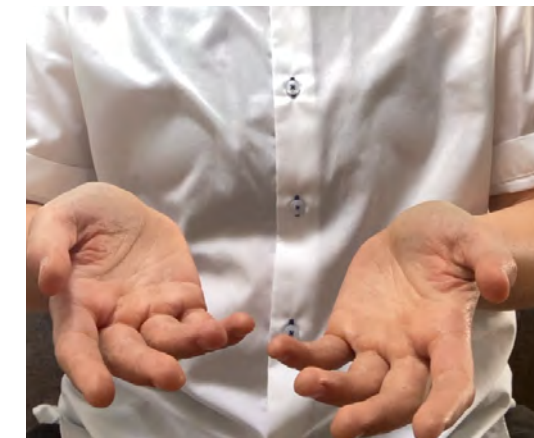
Fearful, flailing through important decisions, I soon fell into a depression. It felt like my inner world mirrored the mounting crises so apparent during that first pandemic summer, like I’d flung my body down an unending cavern, the last of some potential energy draining away. I lost any will to dance, found computer choreography impossible to follow, never felt still enough in my own skin to surrender to movement. The sense memory of bodies dancing together in space felt totally lost. Something I wouldn’t touch, even if I could. Marching, masked, through downtown Oakland, was the last time I would move with so many others for months and months.

Trying to ease back into my body, I joined Suzanne Beahrs’ three-week online improvisational “playshop” in the early weeks of 2021. We tried Steve Paxton’s “small dance,” standing in one place, noting all the minute protections the body offers to keep itself upright. William Forsythe’s [room writing](#), tracing the architecture of a space with our limbs. Something started opening again in me, wayfinding in the textures and geometry of home. Once, I lost track of time on a walk and called in from the Rockridge BART parking lot, the din of passing traffic above a stochastic score.

Suzanne said that many of her improvisations are inspired by teaching small children, and lent me a book, which I used to make a movement class for my housemate’s young daughter and her homeschool kindergarten classmates while we sheltered in place. We made sculpture gardens out of our bodies, learned some movement language– heavy, light; soft, hard; slow, fast – and tested out the terms. They talked readily about safety, death, the stories they saw in each other. They grew taller.

After getting to know people who have been dancing for much longer, I recognize the gift of beginning when

“I have arrived, I am home.” This is a meditation offered in Thich Nhat Hanh’s Plum Village tradition, an invitation to return to the home we can always access: our bodies and breath



I did. To be sure, it takes me a while to figure out new choreography, and then to stop pantomiming. Enthusiasm is no substitute for skill, as much as I wish it were. But this late start spared me the expectation of dancing as a little girl. I am lucky to experience this practice as a chiefly liberatory one.

What marks the end of a beginning? I worry some at the risk of announcing my love of this practice here, pinning it to language, stirring this seed too soon. All the unknown futures in which it flourishes and falters will shelter together here on the page. I suppose I chose to write, to accept this invitation, because I believe that everyone’s most ordinary stories are worth telling.

I wanted to write to someone who finds themselves coming into this practice for the first time, or after a long time, feeling like it’s too late: there is a home waiting here. Perhaps I am also writing a missive to some future self, worn-down: you can begin again (you can always be beginning). Perhaps above all I am writing to everyone who sustains this practice – past, present, future: thank you.

As shelter-in-place began to ease, I leapt at the chance to dance in Shaunna Vella’s first in-person class at Shawl-Anderson, on May 4, 2021. It all felt tentative, reverent. We wondered at how safe we were, giddy to move together in the newly unfamiliar Studio 1. Shaunna’s class was the last I’d taken before Shawl closed, and returning to it the first of many bittersweet symmetries that would unspool in this re-emergent time.

Now, I rattle my bike up to Shawl-Anderson most days, relieved to find a practice rhythm, to find joy in dancing again. Yet I notice the ways that joy can both quiet and expose awaiting pain. How do



I skillfully steward the pleasure that movement provides? How can I let it be a path into wisdom, rather than a way to paper over discomfort?

I ask this in part because my gratitude for dancing again is laced with grief – over not seeing the staff who welcomed me so fully at the Center anymore, over what I know, and don’t know, about how this institution has weathered the pandemic, and the longstanding issues that it threw into sharp relief.

In December 2020, Piper Thomasson wrote an open letter, “[White Supremacy Culture at Shawl-Anderson Dance Center](#).” In it, she describes a harmful pattern of unfulfilled promises, opaque decision-making, and the nascent equity practice that she helmed before her Equity Practice Advisor role was not reinstated. It is a generous and beautiful message, encouraging the Shawl-Anderson community to hold our space accountable to its radically inclusive vision.

I believe this is possible because I’ve already sensed it. Not long after I started dancing, I came to a Queer Partnering workshop taught by Andrew Merrell and Rogelio Lopez during the first [Queering Dance Festival](#). I was partnered with Deneka Siu, who kindly guided me through the sweet phrases, more advanced choreography than I had ever tried. We shared weight, giggles, delighted in our rare masc-masc Asian coupling. We could feel our matter; we could feel our mattering.

Owing so much of what I know of dance to the teachers and staff at Shawl-Anderson, I hold the message Piper shared with a heavy, angry, hopeful heart. Shawl-Anderson has given me so much. I want to witness and contribute to its healing and growth, too.

I hear some dance makers say

that they approach their work as a research practice; a way to work through human puzzles at the most elemental level. I encountered this same notion when I studied Go Ju Ryu karate in Okinawa. My sensei Kazuhiro Hokama would work on the characteristic hard/soft movements, startling the dojo’s visitors with how much power could move through his small frame. “*Kenkyuu, kenkyuu*,” he would smile (I’m doing research). He always told me to relax – this was how to move with the most power.

As we return to in person dancing, I savor the ways we can turn toward each other in shared space. After her warmup, Dana Lawton breaks for hellos and hugs. Nol Simonse offers “modern dance moments”: paired tactile feedback to refine alignment. At the end of class, Shaunna Vella invites us into a circle to exchange quiet eye contact with one another. Rogelio Lopez thanks each of us with a small bow, tells us to “Let our family, friends and pets know that he’s here at the Center, every Monday night.” There is a tacit message in all of this: I want you to be at home here.

Every dance teacher at least grazes against this subtext of our coming together to move, the unnamable ways we are nourished by it and one another, but Randee Pauvre openly encodes it in ritual. At the end of her Sunday morning class, we assemble in a circle where Randee leads us in a [locating practice](#) from Babette Lightner: “Here I am, as I am, in the world, as it is, supported by the planet, floating in time, awake to my state of being. Whoosh!”

When I’m overcome, when I can’t skillfully hold what’s happening in me, or in the world,

movement reminds me there is home awaiting. It helps me touch that sublime recognition: no self. Held by the path offered in simple instructions, in complex choreographies, I can submit to collective wisdom. Dance is a practice in the queer art of coming home.

This art is not only finding home in one’s body, but recognizing the delicate sprawling network of life that sustains that possibility of finding home at all. Every expression of our bodies is a dependent arising, a gift uncovered.

*The Big Reveal* ends by gesturing at the fear that the tools we create could draw us further away from what it means to be human – or worse, that we’ve already unwittingly become instruments of our own alienation. The company’s CEO (Patricia West) and Product Manager (Melecio Estrella) sing: “I just wanna infect you, crawl into your brain ... We don’t know where this will go, scatter all the seeds we sow, feed you and you’ll grow.”

What grows is up to each of us, and all of us. Dance is a precious prefigurative space; where we can let our most radical wishes flourish, play with possibility, tend the fragile roots of healing and change. Within it, we can arrive – we can be home.

EMMA TOME lives in Oakland, California, and dances most days.

#### GESTURES

1. Here i am
2. As i am
3. In the world
4. As it is
5. Supported by the planet
6. Floating in time
7. Awake to my state of being
8. whoosh





# LEARNING TO DANCE

## OR WHEN LESSONS ON TRANSFORMATION ARE LESSONS ON BELONGING

BY HANNAH MELEOKAIAO AYASSE

When I was a freshman in college, in the massive experience of culture shock,<sup>1</sup> I made a short dance video for a class final about home. I shot the video with my phone leaned against a makeshift tripod of books and chairs. The frame captures a dance studio with mirrors, wood floors, and a ballet barre and 18-year old me using the barre to dance from the left (west) to the right (east) side of the screen. It was a (not-so-discreet) metaphor for my journey from California to Washington DC and my confused feeling of displacement in trying to transition my sense of home from my upbringing placed entirely in Oakland, CA to a DC dorm room with a nice midwestern roommate who wanted me to coordinate with her nautical design preferences. To spoil the ending of this distraught dance from left to right of the studio, I ended up freeing myself from the ballet barre

<sup>1</sup> Shock like jumping into a freezing cold lake and the air getting sucked from your lungs. Shock like your brain is not going to come back on-line for a second because it's too busy trying to figure out where it is and what the new rules of this new game are. Shock as in everything you learned about how to relate to people as a child has now stopped working and people laugh at you rather than with you now so maybe that's who you are and are you actually okay with this new reality. you worked so hard to get here but you never actually imagined what here would feel like and you did not know it would be so different why didn't anyone tell you.

(which represented being stuck on the idea of home as material/tangible/physical place), moving to the center of the room, and finding the knowledge that through dance and embodiment practices I have come to understand that home is...get ready...“My Body.”

While that dance piece erred on overly simplistic, it reflected a central truth that I was touching then and has come into greater clarity in adulthood: home is a feeling more than it is a place. Home is what community feels like. Home is what familiar tastes, sights, smells, and sounds feel like. Home, like all sensations, really does exist in the body.

If we understand home as a place, I am still technically “home.” I am in the same place I lived when I was born. I still live in the East Bay. I am renting my



aunt's house in Berkeley but this isn't the home I grew up visiting her in. It doesn't register as the home I feel nostalgic for. It doesn't register in my body.

When I moved back to the Bay after college, I went through the time warp of gentrification. I wanted to find an adult life, a life tapped into the art scene, a queer life somehow or another. There, I found myself surrounded by no one who felt like “Home Oakland.” I'm still looking. I'm still playing early 2000s hits when I'm homesick<sup>2</sup>.

For my 27th birthday party, I had a kickball game. We drank capri-suns. We ate cheez-its and orange slices and someone brought McDonalds.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HANNAH AYASSE

<sup>2</sup> I'm playing T-Pain and Natasha Bedingfield and Cassie and Maroon 5 and Lloyd and The Fray and Chingy and Ciara and some of them are still making music but nothing as good as “Goodies” or “You” or “Songs About Jane.”

We wore pennies over our shirts that we picked from a bag at random to unlearn all the small and large shames grown out of picking teams. We had a referee with red and yellow cards but she never pulled one because no one really knew if there were rules or what they were or if we were following them. We went back to my house for Zachary's Deep Dish pizza and I played the playlist I had prepared titled “PUBERTY!!!” that started with “Me & U” by Cassie (my 7th grade ring-tone<sup>3</sup>) and was full of the East Bay rappers from when everyone still thought of Oakland as “the hood” - Too \$hort, The Pack, E-40.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that

<sup>3</sup> “Yooooou’ve been waiting so long, I’m here to Answer. Your. Call.”

the Bay Area— and even more specifically, Oakland – has transformed so drastically since my childhood that when I think about home, I think about adolescence. A time when this place really FELT like home. The sense of belonging I felt. I think about the Bay Area I knew when my friends and I spent every free hour together<sup>4</sup>. We didn't talk about belonging then as much as we do now on our group chat. We didn't yet realize there was anything to say about our life experience. We didn't yet need to define the comfort we felt in community. It felt inevitable then.

<sup>4</sup> When we mostly saw the inside of each other's parents' homes but also hours and hours of walking neighborhood streets and trying to take public transportation all the way to Stinson beach for Y's 15th birthday and hanging out in parking lots. So many hours in parking lots. I think about J's blue minivan speeding through the dark streets of the Oakland Hills blasting Frank Ocean and Erykah Badu and Sade.



We relied on each other and we knew it. We weren't fooling ourselves into the myth of self sufficiency, we were aware that we were all being raised by the entire community. We were less aware that we were indelibly forming each other's personalities, value-systems, and sense of identity<sup>5</sup>. We were transforming and had no doubt that we were doing it together.

Adolescence is cyclically relevant right now. If being a teen is the time when we are supposed to break our previous ways of seeing our reality in order to make room for a newly centered adulthood, we are in a collective adolescence at the moment. An inherent part of puberty is that discomfort is necessary for growth. That's a lesson from adolescence I am holding on to in order to survive transformation<sup>6</sup>. Discomfort is necessary for growth but it passes, it always passes. Like adolescence, this is a massive moment of awkwardly moving through and towards<sup>7</sup>, the exhilaration<sup>8</sup> and the doom<sup>9</sup> and the overcompensation<sup>10</sup>, the behaving as if we've already made it to the other side as a way of coping with the chaos of transformation<sup>11</sup>.

Honestly, I am not sure how long adolescence on a collective scale<sup>12</sup> really lasts but I atm trying to lean

5 It was something about how we were all so radically different. Have you ever played that card-matching game called "Set"? The gist is that you look at a grid of nine cards on the table, all with different colors, shapes, and shadings and you need to find sets of three. Without getting too deep into it, on one end of the Set spectrum is 3 cards that are very alike (all red for example) and the other end of the spectrum is three cards that share absolutely no quality. We were a set like that, a group that clicked perfectly together because we were all fully different.

6 Actually can I say thrive? Let's say thrive through transformation.

7 Awkward is okay and there is a future we are moving towards even if we cannot see it clearly.

8 The energy of this time is charged, we will not always be overwhelmed, we may later look back and long for this electricity.

9 "No matter how bad things get, they are always changing" - T.L. Simmons, Long Lost Oakland.

10 Performance is a big part of figuring all of this out, if you are faking it someone else is too. What are you performing and why?

11 We used to think the cashiers at the liquor stores in the Dimond probably really thought that L was 22 and that we all definitely needed to go to the East Coast for college because we were big city people destined for all the glamor and adulthood that the other coast had in store for us. The ideas we have for a more just future are here with us now but they don't yet exist, some of them will come, some of them will transform, we will transform alongside.

12 You're thinking what I'm thinking, right? This pandemic, this social and political upheaval, this climate crisis, this war, this Octavia-E.-Butler-truly-was-a-seer apocalyptic reality has to be transformation, right? There is something on the other side. This is what being on the way feels like, right?



Dance community throughout the years.

Dance community was the kids everyone wanted to be in high school. Dance community was the pre-show announcement not to scream the dancers' names during the performance because it was distracting and then everyone doing it anyway<sup>14</sup>.

Dance community was the familiarity of home through the Hip Hop team in college. A respite from the courses that counted as college credit and brought a realization that dance could also be cerebral. A reminder that my first entry point to dance was music, was a drum, a mirror for the heartbeat.

Dance community was discovering and living into my queerness as a young adult. Looking around and seeing that the people who could imagine taking on the choreography of their own time, their own life, were the peers that kept dancing or started dancing after unmooring from the institution of school. Then even within the widening world of dance and art-making on our own terms, the people who reflected my own experience were all queer.

Dance community as a foil for whatever it needs to be at the time.

14 Ms. James getting on the mic from the tech booth between dances saying "I repeat, kindly do not holler at the dancers during the performance or we will need to bring the lights up." But she knew, we all knew, when you are moved you've got to holler. When you're 16 sitting down in a dark room watching your best friend jump and fly, your voice is all you have to bring your body closer. My friends in the audience were still children enough to participate and almost adult enough to be afraid to be seen in the light.



PHOTO (TOP RIGHT) BY CHRIS KIM

into it while it's here. I am trying to remember a CHANGING body and I am trying to remember belonging. I am reminding myself that I know how to change and I know how to belong because I was taught how to change and how to belong. I think maybe this is part of why I am still dancing. Dance taught me these lessons through physical practice and social reliability. I could talk forever about improvisation and the ephemeral nature of performance and outline all the ways that

dance teaches the body to shift. A choreographer I once trained with used to say "Once it's polished, it's died."<sup>13</sup> He knew that the goal was not to reach anything certain. He knew that the practice and performance of live, body-based art relied on the aliveness of change. He used improvisational scores and small shifts and changes in the plan as a way to keep the performers alert, awake, and engaged on stage. Dancers understand the near impossibility of

13 Hannes Langolf

doing any one thing in exactly the same way every time because sometimes we try. We understand that striving for and achieving perfection do not have to go hand in hand. We practice listening to what arises and following impulses and presence presence presence.

That's the physical stuff. Then, there is the social. Then, there is the reliable formula of finding the dance class, finding the dance team, finding the dance floor when I wanted to find community.

Dance community as a place where we meet with our bodies, speaking in expansion and contraction, in energy and force, softness and articulation. Screaming on the sidelines during practice to give the team energy or pressing your thumb into a stranger's psoas because we are learning to release tension together. Laying our bodies down together or letting our bodies be alone. Learning to ask "what does my body need in this moment" over and over and over again and knowing that the answer will be different over and over and over again.

Something about how people who find themselves in dance space meet each other relationally, physically, empathetically.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that if home is just that, a sense of belonging, then dance helped me learn to belong in my own body. What I am trying to say is: thank you to the teachers who brought me that gift, offered that to me as I was growing into myself, the ones who affirmed my voice and my grounding in my body. Thank you Pope Flyne. Thank you Day1s<sup>15</sup>. Thank you Zafra Miriam. Thank you Dawn James. Thank you Capital Funk. Thank you Oakland even though you've changed. Thank you body even though I've changed.

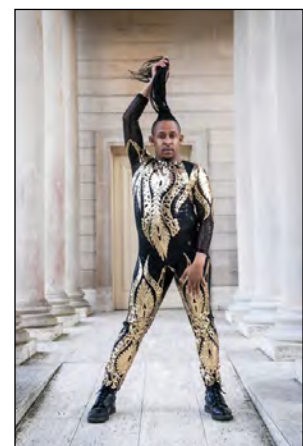
**HANNAH MELEOAKAIAO AYASSE** (she/they) is born and based in Huichin, Ohlone Land also called Oakland, CA. She is a dance artist, administrator, curator, and educator whose work explores deep listening and improvisational practice within interpersonal and environmental relationships. Grounded in community building and creating, Hannah serves as CounterPulse's Program Director, co-curates the Performance Primers and teaches Creative Movement to children aged 3-7 at Shawl Anderson Dance Center. Hannah has presented her own work at Joe Goode Annex, San Francisco Center for the Book, SAFEhouse Arts, Albany Bulb, and various DIY spaces throughout the Bay Area. Hannah holds a BA in Dance and Psychology from The George Washington University and has continued her dance training and performance with various dance companies throughout the Bay Area and Germany.

15 Y. J. L. J. M.





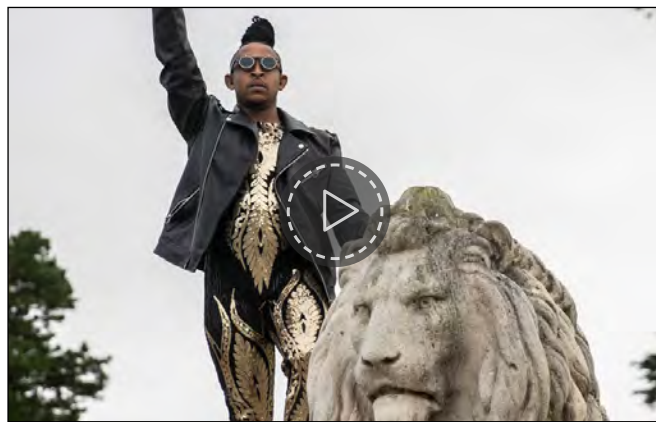
# 10 QUESTIONS IN 10 MINUTES



**Sir JoQ Recommends:**

- Kindness
- Intricate all black costumes
- And the Powerhouse Bar!

“Dance Mission, ODC, and YBCA. Those are my top 3 that gave me my chance and believed in me. Especially during this pandemic, they said ‘hey we still want you to make art. How can we help you? How can we assist you?’ There’s people that care about the arts still.”



PHOTOS BY DEVLIN SHAND

## IN CONVERSATION

WITH ANDRÉA SPEARMAN, DANCERS’ GROUP ARTIST RESOURCE MANAGER

*In Conversation*, a series of interviews exploring exchanges about dance and different folks’ relationship to dance.

AS WE EXAMINE HOME and place and what community means, these questions presented themselves. “How is the dance community a home?”, “How does one bring their personal history to this larger ecosystem?”, “How do we sustain the community connections so that home never disappears?”

In this edition of *In Conversation* I was able to speak with Melecio Estrella, the dynamic Artistic Director of BANDALOOP and Co-Director of Fog Beast, about his journey to making a home for dance making in San Francisco.

Melecio Estrella is a director, choreographer, educator and facilitator based in unceded Chechenyo Ohlone territory. He is artistic director of BANDALOOP, co-director of Fog Beast and longtime member of the Joe Goode Performance Group. He has had three premiers of full length work in 2021: *LOOM:FIELD* in Atlanta, GA, *Transpire* in Boise, ID, and *Time of Change* in San Francisco. Upcoming 2022 engagements include BANDALOOP’s 30th Anniversary Home Season in Oakland, new work at The Virginia Arts Festival in Norfolk VA, LAPublicCanvas at the Ford Theater in Los Angeles, and These Lines are Living at the Animate Dance Festival in Alameda. IG: [@bandalooping](#) [@fogbeast](#)

### MELECIO ESTRELLA



“What would we call this?” Both of us grew up in the Bay, both of us have an affinity for fog. Fog being this thing that can obscure and reveal, and can condense and then disappear. Then the beast being us, our bodies. We’re gentle beasts.”

— MELECIO ESTRELLA



LISTEN HERE

PHOTO BY JESSICA SWANSON

MARGARET JENKINS DANCE COMPANY

CELEBRATING OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY

WORLD PREMIERE

GLOBAL MOVES

WITH INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORS

CROSS MOVE LAB CHINA

KOLBEN DANCE COMPANY ISRAEL

TANUSREE SHANKAR DANCE COMPANY INDIA

JUNE 16-19, 2022

PRESIDIO THEATRE SF

TICKETS \$20-\$50 MJDC.ORG



# A Love Letter to SAN FRANCISCO

## A Dancer's Understanding of Home

**ROWING UP IN ORANGE COUNTY** for the first 18 years of my life was an emotional and challenging experience. I grew up in Santa Ana, which is an impoverished small city mostly made up of Latine-Americans. At that time, most residents of the city were struggling to make ends meet, losing family members to gang violence, and hiding away from immigration services. I, like most of them,

had much in common. My single father is undocumented which meant my sibling, father, and I struggled day to day. My sibling and I grew up moving from garage, to small bedrooms, to basement, so discussing the concept of home is a very emotional one for me. Mostly because, for the majority of my life, I felt like I did not have a home. Sometimes, I still question if I do. Santa Ana never felt like home to me. It was dysfunctional at best and

---

by JESSE ESCALANTE | *photo by QUEERING BEAUTY*





abusive at worst. It definitely was not the ideal white picket fence home built for a nuclear family and I was not part of a privileged family that got everything handed to us. Santa Ana felt like a prison to me and I always knew I was meant for so much more than it. It in so many ways was holding me back from being able to be my authentic queer and artistic self. So, I ventured into a city I had visited once and instantly fell in love with: San Francisco.

Over the past 7 years of being a San Francisco resident I have seen and experienced quite a bit. I have had my fair share of highs and lows in this city and felt I truly came of age here. Moving to San Francisco was my beacon of hope, my light at the end of the tunnel, and my escape. I moved to San Francisco at 18 to pursue my BA in Sociology and Dance at San Francisco State University. Coming here would not only challenge me but also answer a long awaited question: what is home?

Finding home within San Francisco would not be a linear, easy journey, nothing ever really is. The next 7 years of my life would be filled with quintessential moments of joy and love, as well as some of the lowest moments I had yet to face. In this journey, I equally found and lost myself while also finding some pretty great people to get lost with along the way. San Francisco has been my greatest teacher, my best friend, my sanctuary, and my home.

I remember the drive into the city so vividly. I remember the feeling of the wind blowing in the car as I peeked my head out the window as I looked at the various signs indicating I was in San Francisco. I remember my dad dropping me off in my dorm and helping me unpack. We explored campus and met my roommates. We grabbed lunch and set up my room. And when it was time, we said our goodbyes. It was a goodbye that felt equally painful and cathartic. I was let go and set free. Set to make my

own decisions, to make my own mistakes, and to learn from it all.

San Francisco State was a mixed experience. As a sociologist, it was a gift. The city was my classroom, especially during the years of 2014-2018. I saw the place I loved so much, fall apart emotionally as it grappled with political changes. The magic of adolescence felt stripped away and all that was left was arguments, riots, protests, and pain. Yet, San Francisco rose up and reminded me of resilience and strength. San Francisco is where I was taught to be an activist and to speak up, out, and against systemic oppression. It is where I attended my first protests, volunteered with my first organizations, and did my first grassroots organizing work. My home was confused as to how the world had come to this, but it was by coming together that we found hope for our future.

As a dancer, San Francisco State was...I'll be quite honest, it was hell. I had professors that deeply affected the self-esteem of many, including myself. This is where I lost myself as a dancer and lost my hope for San Francisco. I was verbally abused by a professor who shamed my body by calling me "too skinny", "too weak", and "needing to go to the gym." She even forced me once to do push-ups in front of the class to try and prove that I could not do them. I remember going home and crying for hours in the shower that day. This would continue for 3 of the 4 years of my education. My self-esteem was the lowest it had ever been and my body felt foreign. San Francisco, a place of hopes and dreams, had lost its magic to me.

Alienated from my community and from myself, I decided my journey in San Francisco was to come to an end. I applied to the Masters in Social Work Program at University of Toronto, my dream school at the time. After a rigorous application process, I was accepted. I was

beyond ready to leave San Francisco behind. I was ready to start a new life and meet new people. Let's just say, the universe had other things in mind for me.

After I graduated from San Francisco State, much of my life changed. I found a queer community that celebrated my brown skin, my femininity, and my art. I found pockets of dancers and choreographers who believed in me and invested in me. I found the magic that was once stripped away from me. Every color felt vibrant, every scent was fresh, and every feeling was warm. I was home again.

Unfortunately, home was being stripped away from me once again. I was still slightly committed to the University of Toronto, but my heart was no longer in it, but I had given up everything to make this dream happen. I told everyone about it. How could I not go? My heart and head were being torn in two separate directions and I didn't know what was the right choice anymore. I followed the road I thought was right for me and went to Toronto for an orientation. There and all alone, I knew I made the wrong choice. So, I went back. With no money, no job, no place to live, and no planned future, as it was all used for my move to Toronto, I hit rock bottom.

This began one of the darkest periods of my life. I was in the city of my dreams and I made the choice to come back, but I lost everything in the process. I was houseless for 5 months and oftentimes would not know where I would be sleeping that day. I couch surfed and stayed with friends. I picked up whatever jobs I could find. But my spirit was broken. Once again, the magic in San Francisco was gone.

Committed to a better future, I invested all my energy into creating the life I wanted. I decided to apply to the University of California, Berkeley for their Social Work program and put myself out there as a dancer once more. I started working a job I enjoyed as a Behavioral Therapist for children with Autism and saved up money

# There have been periods where I became disillusioned with this place and it felt so foreign to me and other periods where I recognized it more than I recognized myself.

---

along the way. After 5 months of feeling hopeless, things changed for me. I found a new apartment to live in, I got accepted to UC Berkeley, I got numerous dance opportunities, and I found my spirit again.

I thought to myself this was it, this was my chance, and I felt unstoppable. And then, a little thing called Coronavirus happened and not just my life, but everyone's lives changed. San Francisco shut down and nothing would be the same. Once again, my home was thrown through the wringer. Yet, I didn't lose hope. I never thought to myself that this was the end of the city I knew to grow and love. It was a hard battle and we are still fighting it, but if San Francisco can do anything, it can fight back.

I started my two-year program at UC Berkeley and did minimum dancing due to few available opportunities. Continuing to build the life I had planned for me looked a little different than my original plan, but I think that was the case for everyone. We had to individually and collectively rebuild our future. My entire first year of grad school was online and the only dancing I did was in my living room or rooftop. The next year or so would be a constant back and forth between looking at a brighter future and regressing back to isolation depending on the severity of the pandemic. Yet, no matter what state

we were in, San Francisco would continue pushing forward.

Presently, we are in the state of looking at how to rebuild our city and our world. While there is so much we do not know and so much out of our control, there is so much resiliency in all of us and this city. There have been periods where I became disillusioned with this place and it felt so foreign to me and other periods where I recognized it more than I recognized myself. It has thrown me curveball after curveball, yet continuously gives me the resources to rebuild myself. Maybe that is home then? Not a perfect fixed state of being, but rather a place continuously working on itself to be better for others.

San Francisco is far from perfect. I could write a whole article on all its imperfections, but I don't think that's what I'm trying to get across here. Rather, I think no one's home is perfect and maybe that's what makes it a home. It tries and there is hope in it, regardless of what happens. It instills hope in its residents and yes, it can be chaotic at times, but it gives us the pieces to build our lives back up into something that isn't quite brand new, but maybe something better than what we had before.

This city is nothing like it was 7 years ago and yet it is still the

same. It will continuously change and I think by not allowing our home to change, we are not allowing ourselves to change. And what a disservice that is to us all. It may look different tomorrow or the day after that. It will definitely look different in the years to come, but no matter what, it is my home. My imperfect, expensive, exhausting, and emotional city that can still produce queer magic, art, BIPOC spirit, political activism, and hope for a better future. I may have been born and raised in Santa Ana for the first 18 years of my life, but San Francisco has raised me like no other. Emotionally, I was raised here. San Francisco, thank you. Thank you for constantly challenging me and accepting me. I cannot imagine myself anywhere but here. San Francisco has seen me grow up and I have seen it do the same. I am truly home.

---

**JESSE ESCALANTE** (he/him/his) is a 25-year-old queer Latine San Francisco resident. Jesse has earned a BA in Sociology and Dance from San Francisco State University. He currently attends the University of California, Berkeley in pursuit of his master's in social work, with this current semester being his last. Jesse specializes in mental health and substance use within adults and hopes to become a licensed clinician to work in substance use. Jesse is also a dancer and has been training since the age of 14. He has trained in Ballet, Modern, Jazz, Contemporary, Jazz-Funk, and Hip-Hop. He uses his dance platform to tell stories of the queer and BIPOC experience, as well as stories of mental health.



# given, found, finding, making, re-making, finding again by NINA WU

**Home is sunshine, warm humid air that feels like a hug, and salt water.**

**Home is sunshine, and the skin that gets to feel it - the face, midriff, naval, shoulders, elbow pits, arm pits, the forearms that want it a little bit more, tops of the feet, ankles, calves, knee pits, and as much of your legs as your shorts will allow.**



I've always been shocked at the prospect that there are people who will go their entire lives with areas of their skin never feeling the hot touch of sun (with the exception of those who are photoallergic). I think about the handful of minutes, or sometimes seconds, of a person's entire life that the skin of their chest, their nipples, or the skin between where their legs meet might have seen the sun. Or maybe never? And why is it these patches of skin? The depravity and denial of the sun on this skin feels like another oppressive act of prudence, sex, and gender.

I take every moment I can to nourish this skin, so it, too, can feel the bright heat of fire light. I've collected and curated the pockets of places and strategies where I know I can bare that skin, and that is largely thanks to the place that is northern California and its micro-cultures. The right summertime swimming holes if you walk a hundred steps around the bend. The clothing-optional enclaves.

If a trail is empty enough, I can squeeze my bra down to my waist like a belt. The skin of my breasts and nipples become awake and energized. I like to think that the sun is also happy to rest on this rare skin. I lament and apologize to this skin that this doesn't happen more often. I hike like this until I hear voices around the corner. I can easily shimmy the bra back up in a second and we're back to sad, depraved skin. Home is all of the skin, in the sun.

*Coming home is stepping off the plane and being enveloped in warm arms. The soft firm embrace of her hug that lets you know you've landed.*

**Home is salt water scenting the air, seasoning the food, and stinging the eyes.**

I think about there being people who will go their entire lives without seeing the ocean, or maybe even a body of water at all. With our bodies so full of water, what does that disconnect do to the spirit? Water holds our grief, our life. It cleanses, soothes, and nourishes. It is powerful and relentless.

I can barely hold the idea that the waves keep crashing against the shores, that the waterfall continues to cascade, and the creek continues to babble before, during, and after me. Unlike the water I pretend I can control from a faucet, this water once set into motion, never stops. This water is a teacher with the lessons it holds. At times, I feel like a piece of debris in the ocean. There is no fighting those waves. There is no room for your desire or plan. There is a relinquishing and surrender that happens and an acceptance of wherever the waves take you. To know this feeling and to be held in this way, what is it like to not have that reference point if you never see or touch the ocean?

What will I go my whole life without experiencing?

**Home is the journey from southern China to south Florida, never straying too far from that 20°N latitude. Even if the people, culture, and language are all unfamiliar and at times hostile, we could still find home in this cross section of earth. Here, the land grows mangos, lychees, longyan, and starfruit; the tropical seas provide fish, crab, and shrimp. The two seasons are wet and dry. There's enough of the familiar to make a new home here.**

My dad dreamt my name would be 吴雪, and so it is. Snow, like Snow White? Like 雪碧? (Sprite's brand name in Chinese.) Like the weather anomaly that happened here in 1977, and before that, 1899? Each Florida Christmas would pass with snowmen made of sand adorned with sunglasses and tropical shirts, Santa would be riding a sleigh of alligators led by one with a red nose, palm trees would be strung with lights, and it'd be a disappointing 70 degrees outside. I'd long for the traditional white Christmases I saw on TV and romanticized the snow. The year I finally understood humidity and lotion's purpose, was also my first snowfall. I was giddy to finally experience this anticipated magic. I was exuberant to be finally realizing and fulfilling my namesake and birthright. Standing outside on a North Carolina lawn, I was curious about the speckles of snowflakes - their size, mass, density, frequency, the physics of snow and what it meant for snow to "stick." For all the snowflakes I drew and cut out of paper growing up, I never imagined those crystalline structures would be so delightfully tiny. I also didn't realize how fleeting they were. Snowballs sometimes hurt? You could also only pack a few before your hands were too numb and wet. The monotonous gray in the skies told me that it would never be sunny and snowing. The sooty piles of week-old snow coupled with the salty slush that had no chance of evaporating was never part of the White Winter propaganda. By my fourth snowfall, I was over it. Snow's alright, but take me back to where it can rain while the sun is out, where the puddles would dry out by tomorrow, and lotion is irrelevant because your skin is moisturized by the air itself.



I grew up on a diet of suburbia in an immigrant household, learning how to be American.

For breakfast, I'd start with fish eyes as the cherished delicacy, the romantic crooning of Teresa Teng, the pride of Chinese propaganda music, and the endless saga of Dragonball Z.

Don't forget to greet aunts and uncles with "Ayi hao. Shu shu hao," sort out everyone's ages to determine if they're a "jie jie/ge ge" or "mei mei/di di" or better yet, flatter a guest by undercutting their age by having the kids greet them as "jie jie/ge ge"

For lunch, I'd scarf down Lunchables, the power ballads of Celine Dion, every memorized lyric and who sang it of the Spice Girls, same for Backstreet Boys, Lisa Frank stickers, the subversive queerness in Sabrina the Teenage Witch, and so much MTV.

Parsing out the embodied etiquette of each culture was switching back and forth between the sweet-saltiness of brunch or dim sum. Elbows on the table were fine at breakfast, rude at lunch. Speaking with your mouth full is a no-no? But my family does that at home all the time. Why would I ask for someone to "pass the mashed potatoes" if I could just reach over and get it myself?

For dinner, I'd answer my parents in English when they spoke to me in Chinese, forge their signatures on my permission slips in lieu of trying to translate and explain to them what was going on at school, then I'd log onto AIM to learn the dialect of suburban Floridian tween.

Asian Fusion cuisine at its finest.



**There is the unwanted home, the home you never elected, or the home that you don't feel connected to, but it is home nonetheless because it's familiar and what you were born into. Or perhaps it isn't the whole home, but rather a room or corner that you see or think about the least.**

Going to any Chinatown, I know the smells, the etiquette, the mannerisms, the pace - like factory settings built into me. I can navigate the storefronts as fluently as the aisles of an American grocery store - understanding this store sells the dried things, the booth next to it has the produce, followed by the butcher, then the bakery. Each one has its own scent profile, not all of them pleasant, but it smells real and unadulterated. It doesn't appear as clean as a Safeway, but at least I know they don't track the filth of the world into their homes by their shoes. Being able to parse out the different affects in yelling, I know that Chinese people aren't just mad all the time.

There's the warm greeting and friendly banter yelling, the "I don't understand, can you clarify" yell, the bargaining yell, the "I'm just making myself heard so you don't have to yell back for clarification" yell. I can't say I embrace all of these cultural norms, but they are familiar, so it's a home I have access to.

**And sometimes, what isn't home can inform what is home.**

The day after the 2016 election, I sought home, somewhere to land and be held. The scrolling of Twitter feeds didn't make me feel connected to anyone. The blank pages of my journal couldn't help me sort out my incoherent thoughts. Music couldn't drown the dismay in my spirit. What could I possibly draw or paint that wasn't just a smear of feces? My appetite didn't crave anything for me to focus on and make. Waking up, I didn't know what to do with myself.

But my body knew. As if on auto-pilot, my body took me to a dance class - the first, closest one I could find. (Thank goodness it was Nina Haft's.) Emotions and thoughts that could only be processed body first, before they could be turned into words, conversation, analysis, reflection, and action, were released - kneading the knot from my gut, sending through my spine, squeezing through the tubes of my limbs, out through my fingertips and toes, roof of my mouth, evaporating through the crown of my head, absorbed by the floor. We found home in community and together, we exorcized our turmoil to create a slimeball of grief that became our new dance partner. Few words were exchanged, but the sharing and collective processing was a potent release. The way dance is a conduit for a synergy that can only be unlocked through a collective practice, made it the balm and homecoming needed for that day.

To be cut off from this synergistic exchange of energy made the loss of dance class during the pandemic feel so much more tangible. I missed bumping into sweaty bodies, seeing the nuanced choices of other dancers to inform my own, feeling inspired and driven - all of this information that could only be gleaned from sharing a space and practice with others. I've taken four online dance classes during the pandemic, and cried during two of them. For this time and circumstance, it was not the home I sought. But if this wasn't home, where else could I find it?

I may not understand the language fully, but it doesn't sound foreign. I've never been able to explain it. It's some in-between literacy that maybe only the children of immigrants can understand. It's certainly not comfortable - to not know what's going on and to not have the tools to decode and start making meaning of anything. But it's also not jarring like going to a foreign place where you don't know the language and alarms are going off in your head that you really don't understand anything you hear. Like everything else that is part of this Asian-American experience, it's something in between. The not-quite-fully-belonging, not-quite-fully-understanding, not-quite-fully-being-able to communicate is familiar.

**You can sometimes outgrow home.**

Like a favorite garment you could never imagine outgrowing, it gradually makes its way out of rotation, until one day it ends up in the donate pile. How did that happen? When? What replaced it? How many of those will we go through? I hope the next person finds joy, comfort, and solace in it like I did.

*What narratives, expectations, norms, structures, constraints, and styles have I outgrown? Which did I outgrow for a moment, but later return to? Which have I redefined for myself? What's next?*

**That means home can also grow with you. A notion, a resting place, that gets renovated a couple times. Or maybe you move to a new spot. Then you make home again. And like the water in our bodies and bodies of water, we're perpetually in process, for the duration of our lives, of finding, making, re-making, resting, and finding again, home.**



If a lifetime is a home, they are the land upon which it is built. The cycles of growth and decay that create the soil, fertile with hopeful dreams ready to nourish any seeds planted, held together by the deep root systems of labor, love, and sacrifice. If a lifetime is a home, he is the groundbreaking that determines where this house will go. It takes a lot of digging and it's not pretty. The vision is hard to see. You sure this is a good idea? If a lifetime is a home, he is the poured foundation, the floor plan, the bones, and forever part of this home. If a lifetime is a home, they are the plumbing and electrical that will make this house livable.

ART COURTESY OF NINA WU



PHOTO BY WILLIE HERCULE

If a lifetime is a home, he is the drywall. You think those walls are set, permanent fixtures of the house, but they can be removed, edited. Maybe you want more of an open floor plan. If a lifetime is a home, they are the things that don't quite work or belong in this house as you figure out your aesthetic and lifestyle - not quite the right paint color, the cheap piece of furniture, the hand-me-down things you never would have chosen for yourself, the kitchen appliance you've only used a couple of times despite swearing you would use it "all the time if you had it." If a lifetime is a home, she is everything that goes inside that makes it warm and memorable. She is the collection of memories that are made and fill a home, that turn into family heirlooms and legends to pass down. She is the plans, projects, and dreams of what you want to do next in the house. She is the promise of finding, making, and sharing home, forever. If a lifetime is a home, I wonder what will become of mine.

**NINA WU** (she/they) is a queer, second-gen, Chinese-American interdisciplinary artist, dancer, mathematician and educator. They believe in the power and promise of community, critical thinking, play, and imagination.

家  
jiā



# BABY BABY, COME ON HOME

by Zoe Camille Huey



**I WAS ONCE A DOCTOR**, a receptionist, a dog-walker, a teenager with a boyfriend and cellphone, a model, a dancer on So You Think You Can Dance, a waitress, and a spy - following in the legacy of Harriet the Spy. I was once a famous artist who sold colored pencil drawings for five and ten cents to save the arctic penguins. I was once the founder and sole operator of a lemonade stand. I was a liaison with the fairies, a builder of fairy

houses, and a culinary mastermind who created nasturtium wraps in my very own backyard restaurant. I was once best friends with a hermit crab named Bob and heartbroken when I had to say goodbye to the little creature. I was once an archaeologist who dug ginormous holes in the backyard. I was a sculptor, who shaped the clay I found in the earth into animals that were part dog, part bird, part fish.

I was once a kid who felt time slipping by, who, in fifth grade, was already worried about regrets that I felt bubbling up. I was once a kid who began to lose myself and

also the way home to myself. I was once a kid who believed, less and less, that I was all these things, because reality and imagination became more and more separated from one another. I was once a kid who played dress up. I am a kid, dressed up in a grown-up suit.

What makes my grown-up suit a grown-up suit, isn't the color or fabric or cost or brand. It isn't the size or washing instructions. My grown-up suit has been slowly growing with me for years now, like a second skin. In my grown-up suit I feel disconnected from my sense of bodily time, my

needs, and my wants. I am more rigid. I find less fascination with the small things around me. I discover less. I am in awe, less. There are times when I manage to sort of step out of my grown-up suit - when holes emerge in the fabric like portals, reminding me of who I am. In these moments I don't feel like a kid again but instead I feel the kid inside of me. These moments happen when I am playing with my dog and together we howl. Or when the toddler I care for and I attentively watch and roll-y poll-y bug crawl through the playground sand. Or when I am in the garden with dirt under my nails, pulling weeds, and I come across a salamander who has made a home in the earth under the bag of mulch. I return to myself when there is nowhere else I have to be.

In thinking about how queerness, home, and creative practice all intersect, I return again and again to ideas of childhood. "Home" can feel like a stillness, but it is not stagnant. Instead, home changes and grows with me, as I search for my way home within my own body. Home is a grounding root and the branches who spiral upwards and out. The word *home* and the word *return* feel deeply related, with *return* referencing a movement both backwards and forwards in time. As I grow older I grow closer to the child within me, so that I can hold my small self again, nurture her, and learn from her. My childhood was not black or white but rather gray- I was safe and loved, and also very anxious. Sometimes, on a whim, I wish I could go back in time, with what I know now, and encourage little me to be more silly and care less about grades and fitting in. But the real desire lies in learning to offer myself now the breath and space and time to *play*.

**MY MOM WAS WHITE.** She grew up in Southern California, with a mom whose lineage traces back to Britain. Her dad was Jewish, probably from Poland, but was never a practicing Jew. My dad is Chinese, born to immigrant parents from a farming region in Southern China in 1952 San Francisco. With two older sisters, he was the first born son of the family (a position of high responsibility).

I am someone who experiences whiteness as both a twisted blessing and a curse. In classic racist fashion, I get the "what are you" question alongside the myriad of guesses about just *who* exactly I might be. I get the backwards compliment that praises mixed-people being so beautifully unique. I have been called white. I have been told I am lucky to look so white. I have the privilege, safety, and access of being half-white. At the same time, whiteness has been a force of erasure in my life.

There was a brief period of my childhood where my dad taught me the numbers in Cantonese. On our visits to Chinatown, he'd encourage me to speak and count in Chinese when it was time to pay for the don tots, cha siu bow, and gin doy. I'd practice my Cantonese numbers in

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZOE HUEY



a blue-lined hardcover notebook, taller than it was wide, with slightly faded yellow pages. I liked how all the numbers in the world were based on ten different characters - ten building blocks to count with infinitely.

Other than the numbers, I didn't learn much Cantonese from my dad. He never felt confident in his understanding of the language, having grown up in a society consumed with pressures to assimilate. English was the language he learned and American comic book superheroes were the men he idolized. But on Lunar New Year, he says, his mom would cook a feast. When I hear him share his stories of food from his culture, I feel something in him soften and light up.

When my dad and I share treats from Chinatown or bake Ling Go for New Years together, I feel close to him. And I feel close to a part of myself that hasn't always felt like it belongs to me. A part I feel like I don't know much about. I am both Chinese and not Chinese. Both white and not white. *Both* and *neither*. Like so many people, I straddle multiple categories, looking for a balancing point in the middle of them. Finding home feels like a practice of trying to describe this space of specific ambiguity, of in-betweenness, of undefined-ness – and honoring, maybe even celebrating, the void from which we feel.

**I FEEL AT HOME IN MY BODY** only to the extent that I feel myself searching for home. I am learning my self worth, locating myself within my lineage and wondering if in my body, my ancestors can meet. I am learning to welcome the wisdom of my body's temporal pacing.

Recently, I've been feeling ghostlike in my body. I have a wispy, foggy sense of myself. I do the tasks I need to do but I am rigid and held and clunky when I move. In a dance class taught by Ainsley Tharp I was offered the practice of speaking the words aloud "I am powerful," while a partner whispered from the sidelines, "You are powerful." In the one tiny and fleeting moment of speaking the words aloud, I did indeed feel a surge of power. But I let it go right after. I let myself go from it. My phys-

---

## Dance has felt like both something I am putting *onto* my body, and something I am birthing *from* my body.

ical body stayed put in the room, but my mind and heart flew away. I fled fast from myself, and from this source of power inside of myself.

A few months ago I lost my mom to a cancerous brain tumor that bloomed like a butterfly in her brain. I am only at the very beginning of reckoning with the hole in me where my attachment to her lay, like a deeply buried

root in the earth, from which I, the tree, grow. I could very much have written a whole essay about *home* in relation to my mom, but I am not ready for that, yet. It feels important to name the way in which grief has returned me to childhood and to home.

**I REPEAT TO MYSELF**, *My feet are standing on the floor My feet are standing on the floor My feet are standing on the floor.* Which is to say, I am a part of this earth and the earth a part of me. I am real. I am taking up space in this room. I am in relationship with the world around me.

**THESE DAYS I SHARE TIME** with a one-and-a-half-year-old girl (N) who is fascinated with the world around her. She is learning how things fit together, taking the caps on and off of markers, and on again, touching the soft and rough sides of velcro, becoming elated with excitement when a big bumble bee flies in through the kitchen window. She lives on her own timeline, clear with what she does and does not want. Together we roll around on the bed, hide in boxes, feed the stuffed animals bites of her oatmeal, and become entranced with the construction work happening next door. She hides in plain sight, covering her face with her eyes. She hides in the closet, and squeals with excitement when she slides the door back to reveal herself standing right in front of me.

N helps me in tracking this deep commitment I have towards rules, obedience, predictability, and order. When N throws her entire bowl of oatmeal onto the floor to see what will happen or when it takes us twenty minutes to get out the door because she insists, at only 18 months, that she must be the one to put on her own lace-up sneakers, I can easily have my patience tested. My reaction of momentary frustration is telling me something very important about my attachment to things going a certain way. N is just a kid, and what

joyousness to live a life where you can spontaneously throw oatmeal into the air to see how it will splat on the floor (not to neglect the importance of teaching N about responsibility and gratitude). What strong will and a heart N has- what fierce independence she displays as she tries to put her tiny right foot into the left shoe. And when, after some period of time that makes sense to her body, she is done trying, N has



no trouble asking for help. She is unafraid of needing. When I help her put on her shoes, I feel a sense of purpose. Yes, my body is in relation to hers, and yes, we are both offering one another a gift of and in our own making.

N guides me into relationship with my own queerness – an embodiment of time that is not rigid, a deep connection with the needs of the body, and sweet laughter that erupts simply from looking at one another (for longer than most adults do). With her, I slow down. I am brought into the present moment as she shows me how much there is to be discovered. This is the dance between her and I, finding a language of love and trust through a language of play.

**DANCE HAS FELT LIKE** both something I am putting *onto* my body, and something I am birthing *from* my body. My dance education includes the white dance lineage of modern and post-modern dance. In college I was, for the most part, taught by white professors. I lived in a world of whiteness. I lived, as whiteness, a feeling I can only describe as a wash of white paint over an already painted image - a sort of masking of the self. It's as if I gave all my energy toward holding up and sustaining the white half of myself in order to be successful, as if I could be

separated from myself. And in this loss, so too, was the loss of play. My perfectionism, the wanting to please, the feeling that my art could be *good* or *bad* all took me away from myself. I looked so intensely outward and worried so much about what I *should* be making. So of course, making from my heart was confusing. I craved a relationship of trust with dance and with my dancing body so we could all play together. Yet when the making becomes tense with linearity and endpoints, and tied up with self-worth and image, the messy scribble of a process has a hard time being free to wander.

I hold the question of what happened in the transmission of movement from the white bodies who taught me to my body. For a long time this question has felt very serious to me. I am waiting for the world of white dance lineage and the world of my body to arrive at a settled and peaceful coexistence. I'm realizing that this both isn't the point, and isn't going to happen, especially if I'm trying to make it happen. The two worlds must instead live in *play* with one another. The tension itself can be playful (which doesn't make it less serious or rigorous or focused). I can welcome the embodiment of the question, allow it to move and morph with me and within me, and let go of trying to *solve* anything. The answer is in the day

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZOE HUEY



to day. The answer is in the queerness of living as a million possibilities, of finding wholeness in all the moving parts.

**I AM WRITING FROM WITHIN** my very own fort. This fort is made of draped and hung pieces of tracing paper, which have been cut through with an x-acto knife, dunked into a pot of leftover beet juice, sprayed with water, crumpled up again and again, colored upon with oil pastel, sewn together, glued together, and splattered with black ink.

This visual art/performance piece I am currently in conversation with- this fort (which has yet to have the right title) has been slowly finding form in my imagination for a long while now. On nights when I can't fall asleep I lay in bed, close my eyes, and bit by bit compose ideas in my mind. I see a dark theater space, with tracing paper drawings hanging in different formations. I see lights creating shadows on the walls. I see lights layered upon other lights to create double images with differing foci. I sometimes see myself in a red suit in a corner, either installing the work or laying down

The answer is in the queerness of living as a million possibilities, of finding wholeness in all the moving parts.

within its nest. There is never an image of me performing. I started to hang up these drawings in my apartment (in a room partially designated as empty “making” space). I hung the drawings from the ceiling with tiny nails and thread, used sewing pins to attach them side to side, and push pins to secure them to the walls. Every now and again I rearranged the pieces in the space. I started to make more drawings. I grew curious about the texture of tracing paper and all the ways I could manipulate the material. For a medium that's commonly used to transfer an image from one surface to another, or to act as one layer of a larger whole, tracing paper is quite durable. I grew excited about the paper as something born from a liminal space. In cutting out shapes from the thin paper I designed a map of where the light can and cannot go.

As the papers began to take shape as a fort, I realized that I needed to make the piece in my homespace (rather than a separate studio). With the COVID-19 pandemic and losing my mom, going “out and about” and “hitting the town” have felt challenging. If my life was once a large circle, it has now shrunk and condensed to a smaller, but no less bright circle. I am fortunate to have a safe and cozy apartment, which my partner and I moved into only three months ago. I am still nesting and building trust with the space. And seeing as I am still getting to know the space (and the space is still getting to know me), why not make a space within a space - a time travel device heading straight to the heart of my childhood, in which I might eat an

after-school snack of apples and peanut butter, draw fantastical made-up creatures, listen to Ramona Quimby Age 8 and the Harry Potter series, both on repeat, from a cassette tape player. The fort welcomes my childhood home into my new home, and it whispers as it crinkles in the wind, of the magic that is everywhere.

While cooking dinner one night, I asked my partner if they ever built forts when they were a kid. He told me that his forts always took place in a blizzard. His stuffed animal friends would get lost in the storm and he'd bravely rescue them. Once back inside the fort, safe from the snow and wind, he'd nurse the animals back to health. When Luca told the story, he emphasized the heroism he felt when facing the blizzard. Afterwards I think, what tremendous heroism lies in acts of nurture, too.

**I REPEAT TO MYSELF,** *My feet are standing on the floor My feet are standing on the floor My feet are standing on the floor.* Which is to say, I am a part of this earth and the earth a part of me. I am real. I am taking up space in this room. I am in relationship with the world around me.

**IT IS MORNING AND I GO INTO THE KITCHEN.** Mom is pouring hot water into a tall, silver teapot with a long spout. She's bustling about in slippers and sweatpants. She's putting dishes away. She's washing dishes. She's roasting nuts in our toaster oven. She's warming up two mugs with a pour of hot water, in preparation for the tea. She's warming up milk and adding the milk to the strongly brewed Earl Gray or Irish Breakfast.

She pours two cups of tea and sits down with me at the kitchen table. Together, we do a word puzzle in the daily newspaper.

**IT IS MORNING AND I SIT ON THE DECK** outside of my mom's studio in the backyard. The dogs lay on blankets soaking up the bright, hot heat - heat that seems to melt and pour like a thick slow river from the mouth of the sun. Mom is meditating inside her studio. Around her shoulders is a worn red and orange cloth that my sister and I bought years ago from a vendor at the Telegraph Avenue Winter Street Fair.

She is done meditating and she comes outside to sit with the dogs and me. We chat about this or that. A part of me wishes that this moment of morning - of skin soaking up sun, of beginning, of saying hello - could last all day.

**ZOE HUEY** is a queer interdisciplinary artist born, raised and currently residing on unneeded Chochenyo Ohlone territory, also known as Oakland, CA. Through painting, drawing, movement, and multi-media experimentation, they weave together curiosities around mixed race and non-binary embodiment. Their making is propelled through work with children, a deep love of dogs, and abundant gratitude for the ocean, redwood forests, collaboration, and friendship.



**RHYTHMIX CULTURAL WORKS AND  
THE CITY OF ALAMEDA PRESENT**



# ISLAND CITY WATERWAYS

**Featuring ODC/Dance, 13th Floor, Akira Tana Trio and Maze Daiko**

**Saturday and Sunday  
MAY 21 & 22, 2022**  
**at 2700 SARATOGA STREET, ALAMEDA**

**FREE. RSVP REQUIRED.**  
**rsvp at ISLANDCITYWATERWAYS.ORG**

Presenting Sponsor







dancersgroup



SPRING 2022 indance | 51



# to remain empty at all times, an effervescent palimpsest (or love letter) for the heart

by ESTRELLX SUPERNOVA

## I.

Where is home?  
Home is where the heart is.  
And where is the heart?  
At the center of the Earth.

Center.  
Core.  
Center.  
Core  
Center.  
Core.

Suddenly, a channel appears. A channel with several nodes and receptors located within and outside of the body.

You have to make a choice on how you'd like to enter the space.

Go with your gut. Always.



PHOTO BY WILLIAMS COLLEGE PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

Our bodies are mirroring the body of the Earth and the Earth in turn mirrors the pathways and forces of the Universe. Each cell of our bodies is a miniscule fractal of this much larger picture, containing within its structures a reflection of the macro ecosystems that make our lives on this planet possible. We are interminably moving within a series of spirals and concentric circles whether we can tune into these perceptual shifts and movements or not. What happens in one part of the system (or body), directly impacts another aspect of that same system (or body). What are the implications of being so deeply entangled with one another? What does this mean about boundaries? How can we use this quantum understanding to leverage the power of our differences instead of using them to become more polarized? And yet even polarization is necessary in the process of evolution we find ourselves in. What benefit does polarization provide? I believe in \_\_\_\_\_. My voice matters. I matter. In order to understand our limitations, sometimes we must drift into and out of extremes. And extreme pressure is what precious stones need in order to step more fully into their true form, shape, and nature. Each one of us, a unique vessel, a unique stone, vibrating at a unique frequency, imprinted with a divine purpose to breathe and be. Be in joy, in pleasure, in love.

What if? What if? What if I just spent time strengthening my imagination and my relationship to my inner child?

Thank You:

Water.  
Air.  
Animal & Plant Beings.  
Gravity.  
Celestial Bodies.  
My Constellation of Care.  
Our Ancestors and ourselves as Future Ancestors.

Without their effort, I would not be here today writing these words or perhaps I would be, but in a different form, language, tone.

## II.

“To be islanded” are lyrics that stand out from a recent Moses Sumney track I was listening to, where Sumney’s guest, Taiye Selasi, speaks about the experience of

growing up feeling islanded. This resonates with my nomadic spirit that has been in search of a new home base for a while. It’s funny the way being in the thick of the search creates blindspots to what has been right in front of me the whole time. I was talking with a friend, Alexis, at the beginning of the pandemic and we both shared that shifting into an even more isolated state due to the pandemic actually felt like the rest of the world was catching up to where we had already been. I was in awe and struck by the unified choreography of the entire globe shutting down, slowing down, and moving into becoming islanded. Islands of grief, loss, transmutation, surrender, mutual care, heart break, being mirrored room by room, country by country. We are and will continue to mirror one another. What are the through-lines and unifying forces at play? In Lak’ech. Birth. Death. Rebirth.

In conversation with another friend, day, they mentioned that the apocalypse we are facing now has been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years. I agree. Those of us with bloodlines that extend into multiple diasporas continue shadow dancing and tender wrestling with our various selves. How do we bring and invite these disparate parts home and into a cohesive whole? Our people have already been through this before so how do we source into their wisdom and resilience? Why does this pattern of oppression continue to repeat itself? What has not yet been integrated from this pattern? What core wound lies at the root? What need remains unmet? And are we ready, individually and collectively, to divest from these patterns and give them the space that they need to transmute? Are you ready to let go of the identities you hold so dearly and close to your heart as a gateway for remembering who you really are?

How did our people not see this coming and how were our own people involved in perpetuating the cycle of trauma, violence, and oppression? What function, desire, and need is served/met by those oppressing? Are we subconsciously agreeing to being oppressed? How do we rupture the systemic infrastructures that are in place tying the bow of Manifest Destiny together? And how can we conjure another way, the old way, the way of pre-colonial magic (without romanticizing this time) and knowing that this magic is right here in front of all of us, and within us, hidden in plain sight?



D  
N  
A

And as we know there were *always* beings, human and non-human, who were stewards of these lands before colonial forces came to lay claim over a place, disrupting these ecosystems vibrationally by giving them a new name. What we name anything matters. What is your preferred name? What are your preferred pronouns?

Stolen.  
Wealth.  
Stolen from beneath our feet.  
Voices silenced.  
Limbs shackled.

What happened to you that your prime directive has become to consume even to your own detriment? “More,” they said, “I want more. What I have isn’t enough. And therefore, I am not enough and I won’t be enough until I have everything. Give me everything so that I can hoard and fill the void of my existence with distractions that buy me time so I don’t have to feel my pain.” I’ve been guilty of this too though. Of piling on the workload as a way of running away from myself. Of hyperproductivity that gets in the way of calling in the kind of intimacy I desire. The beauty has been that

ately hung up, but it was too late. I could hear the front door being unlocked and my mom’s gentle voice whispering to the ICE officers in Spanish.

I’ve been thinking about this moment and my parents’ migration to the United States recently and how this has afforded me the privilege of and access to U.S. citizenship. It took them 10+ years to go through their process of naturalization that unfortunately involved this incident of deportation. Deportations often happen in broad daylight and at wee hours of the morning so as to be discreet and not sound the alarm within the respective neighborhoods. In essence, there is a system in place that grants humans with the authority to disappear and move bodies. Lxs Desparecidxs. This event created a series of ghosts within the family that haunted us, in addition to the phenomenon of feeling islanded for being queer within this same family. What do you do with the presence of someone you love who is still alive yet no longer around? Does this qualify as a kind of death?

This deportation happened during Obama’s tenure as president leaving my family bitter, torn, economically in debt, and stoking anti-Black sentiments. In 2021, I found out that I have roots connecting me to Angola, further complicating these anti-Black, anti-Indigenous

And as we know there were *always* beings, human and non-human, who were stewards of these lands before colonial forces came to lay claim over a place, disrupting these ecosystems vibrationally by giving them a new name.

no matter where in the world I have gone, my wounds were there to welcome me, asking me to attend to them. To hold them with reverence and acknowledge how they have shaped me. Even the darkest of shadows need love too and often contain the medicine you need and are meant to share with the world.

### III.

It was 6:05am when the phone rang and my dad’s voice, full of terror, said “Go wake up your mom and sister and tell them NOT to open the door.” I immedi-

sentiments that have been expressed within the bloodline. How do you love someone even when their views do not align with your own? How do I account for the gaps in information I have been able to access and theirs? Intergenerational collaboration takes work.

My mother eventually followed my sister’s journey back to Guatemala because if she didn’t, it would have delayed the process of either of them obtaining U.S. citizenship and potentially not being able to return at all. I couldn’t believe it. How could this be happening for a f\*\*\*\*\* piece of paper? How many people are waiting and continuing to wait? Waiting for the facade of a fractured American Dream?

### IV.

Let’s be real:

There is no level playing field here. We have to co-create it and turn to nature and AfroIndigenous stewards. There are several businesses in the form of industrial complexes with legislation that keeps the system well oiled and moving forward. There is a scarcity mindset that needs to be attended to coming from inherited and experienced trauma, and all of the systems need to be radically redesigned without perpetuating the same colonialist patterns, and people need to be compassionately held accountable without being discarded or executed.

How do we move and create within a frequency of abundance when so much of our education and infrastructural systems are drilling into our subconscious that we are marginal, marginalized, working-class bodies, never going to amount to anything except the pipeline? I genuinely rebuke this on the daily.

So...how do we do this?

Follow your pleasure.  
Ask your heart.  
Take some time to listen to the frequency and tone of your Spirit.  
Together we can come up with a myriad of approaches.

I don’t think the U.S. ever really felt like home until this last year when I was forced to stay and examine my American-ness.

What makes me American?  
What makes me cringe?  
What can I not say?  
What ancestral lineages claim me?



PHOTO COURTESY OF ESTRELLA SUPERNOVA

#### TURN-ONS:

When I think about my American identity, I immediately think of the movie *Mean Girls*. There is something so iconic and poignant about how this film represents everything beautiful and terrible about this country through narratives centering high school coming-of-age motifs (and the lack of any BIQTPOC/BIPOC lead roles in the film...surprise surprise). I’m obsessed with Regina George. I’m obsessed with “on Wednesdays we wear pink.” I’m obsessed with the cheesy Christmas dance routine they do, especially when the CD player gets kicked into the mom’s face accidentally. I’m definitely into morbid humor.

I LOVE a good burger with fries. I LOVE chicken tenders and mozzarella sticks and slushies on a hot summer night on the East Coast. I LOVE(D) smoking blunts. I LOVE brunch after a night out with the homies. I LOVE Whole Foods. I LOVE my BIQTPOC+++ lovers, cuties, who are my ride or die



fam-fam through thick and thin and make this place what it is...one of many homes.

I LOVE Beyoncé, Rihanna, Shakira, Lady Gaga, RuPaul, Selena, and other American icons.

And let's be real again: I don't know if I would have survived attending a public high school like the one in *Mean Girls* or in the neighborhood I was born in back in NJ. I ended up at a boarding school where luckily if anyone was verbally homophobic and/or physically attacked me in any way due to my queer-ness they would have been expelled. The boarding

third world country with a gucci belt on," as an IG post so deliciously reminded me last week.

I can't stand the waiting in line, waiting in line, wait-ing in line at the DMV, at the doctor's office, at the post office, at the restaurant. I don't like shopping malls (especially Walmart where they sell guns like candy). I don't like the fact that wealth that belongs to the people is being hoarded, that there isn't a robust healthcare sys-tem or a robust basic living income for ALL. I'm ques-tioning the efficacy of cancel culture. I'm over the ethos of professionalism and having to be nice to white peo-ple who aren't doing their work (especially those folks

## An inherent part of being in a human body means wrestling with limitations, boundaries, and imposed definitions.

school saga is an entirely different story for another day, but what I will say is that those Berkshire moun-tains became a nest, home, resting ground where I started dancing.

**2003 - 2006:** I was selected to be the morning announcements, birthday roll-call person and this involved reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, every day, for three years. I was always late and subconsciously, prob-ably on purpose because I hated doing this. The begin-ning of healing my relationship to my own voice.

**TURN-OFFS:** small talk especially the kind during intro-ductions where people really just care about the insti-tutions you've attended and the networks you're a part of and then ask, "No, but where are you *really* from?... If you're from Africa, why are you white? OMG Karen, you can't just ask people why they're white!"

I have a strong distaste of the holidays as faux rea-sons for gathering and expressing love, the Electoral College, the Gregorian Calendar, Newton's Laws of Motion / white men in general creating rubrics and standards and systems that only acknowledge their privileged ontology (and hey...I LOVE me some sci-entific method and mathematical equations, however nothing is devoid of Spirit / Spirit will probably never reveal itself through data and statistics because Spirit is unquantifiable), the genocide/militarization of Cen-tral America that was (and probably still is) funded by the U.S. and then the labeling of an entire people and their land as third world, when in fact the U.S. is "a

who are in the spiritual / healing world and bypassing hella hard). I'm over the gatekeepers. I'm over the white picket fence and the cis-het-monogamous couple with their three kids, their dog, their cat, and the respective homes for each of their pets.

Don't get me wrong: I definitely yearn to have a series of homes, to live a life that centers my pleasure and desires, but NOT at the expense or exploitation of another being's life and NOT without disregarding the Earth as a primary collaborator and living being-system. What is possible when wealth is circulating and moving through conscious minds, hearts, hands?

## V.

Since high school, I've been blessed with the opportu-nity to study abroad through varying dance and cho-reographic contexts. What I've loved about my journeys is that each place brings out hidden energies within my genetic code; a zodiacal alchemy is allowed to come for-ward and express itself in ways that aren't always pos-sible within the United States. Something I've noticed is that the older I get, the more protective, sensitive, and tender I become with respect to my gender expression. I genuinely feel so weighed down by conditioning that my next area of compassionate examination is unpack-ing this thread by thread. In undergrad, I definitely felt more connected to my femininity and now my mas-culinity feels more present like an amulet, a protective mechanism. I know there are no rules here, but I silently

whisper to myself that I'm non-binary, Two-Spirit, yet again what words, sounds did my peoples use for these expressions? What words, sounds, movements do I wish to create?

So what do binaries allow for? What is important to acknowledge about dichotomous thinking and how easy it is to trip into divided ways of thinking? What I recognize and define as the color blue was taught to me so now the work becomes seeing that color for the first time over and over again until it defines itself to me without any external imposition. This is what I want for myself. A fresh start. A new point of departure.

An inherent part of being in a human body means wres-tling with limitations, boundaries, and imposed defini-tions. Yes, our Spirit is infinite, but our body needs food, rest, touch, companionship, motivation. These energies, like the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine, are con-stantly in an improvisatory dance where through our choices we get to gift ourselves what we need moment to moment. And sometimes we slip beyond our edges. And this is often necessary too so that we understand what our limits are. The skin becomes a direct expres-sion of this, both sheltering us from the external world yet soft and porous, allowing what we need to feel fully nourished in, inside out / outside in, in.

Yet even the skin cracks and tears.  
Nothing lasts forever.  
Not even the flesh on these bones will.  
The flesh will ultimately return and feed the Earth in an infinite cycle, spiral, and loop.  
Fractals on fractals on fractals.

So what is a boundary?  
An invocation?  
A prayer?  
A request for space and time to discern what one's true needs and desires are?

A boundary allows me to fill up the well of my capac-ity first and foremost, and from this place of abundance extend my energy out into the world.  
A boundary can also change with time.

How much time?

As much time as you need, Queridx, Dear One.

There are no timelines or due dates for your healing process.

## VI.

On an application I was writing one of the questions asked me, "When have you felt the most free?"

I replied:

- The House party I stumbled upon on a pier in Jer-sey City that was happening along the Hudson River, a celebration of multi-generational Black life;
- Spending time with loved ones where the conversa-tion flows and the energy around us becomes light and sweet like honey;
- Where there is space to dance, feast, make love, move and become bodies of waters, becoming mountainous bodies;
- The sensation of performing and communing with my Cosmic Self, with all of me, a site where I am able to create a new positionality, where I get to shift my perspective, which is a gift because it means I am training myself to see the world differ-ently. And from this place of softened awareness, I become more available to receive unconditional love and compassion. This doesn't always feel like a walk in the park though. There is also space for grief, rage, sadness, and disorientation too. Of sifting through the mud and doing my best to discern what is my own, what is collective, what is ancestral, what is not my own. There is no right or wrong here, Queridx. There are just expe-riences and emotions that yearn to channel through us, through you. Experiences and emotions that yearn to be acknowledged by our own presence. Through this witnessing, they are granted permis-sion to pass through our vessels and into the Earth. We must give ourselves permission to move on;
- The spaces and places where I don't have to com-partmentalize or hide any part of me, especially the parts of me that are spiritual, that have experi-enced harm, that are weird, witchy, ritualistic, into erotic excavation; spaces and places where ALL of me is welcome exactly the way that I am. Nothing to fix, nothing to do, no need to perform here. This is the space I am busy cultivating. Simply being and basking in the presence of others who are committed to doing the same;



- The Holy Spirit;
- The Dance Floor Make-Out;

I picked up the phone and texted my mother, “I don’t go by that name anymore. Mi nombre es Estrellx. Si quieres que nuestra relación y amistad sigan creciendo va ser muy importante que integres esto,”

“Ok esta bien. Que pases un lindo día.”

They don’t understand. They’re from another generation, another timezone, another planet. And grace, offer them grace.

“Tienes que saber que va a tomar tiempo... poco a poco.”

“Yo entiendo.”

It’s interesting how somatically impacted I feel when folks accidentally use my dead name. On some days it doesn’t matter and on other days a shudder runs through my spine in acknowledgment that the phase constituted by Randy Reyes has passed. Conversely, the shudder also signifies that I am becoming aligned with a new identity and frequency. The frequency of Estrellx Supernova is asking me to change and show up for myself each and every day, especially when old patterns rear their heads and jump to the surface not wanting to let me move forward. A new name, like giving a work a title that aligns with your choreographic vision, is a humble announcement of all the work it has taken to bring the project to fruition. Estrellx is my present-future self and acknowledges the insurmountable loss I have had to move through, the reclamation of my inner child, the tectonic shifts within my own healing journey that brought me back home to myself, to this primary relationship that I had neglected for such a long time. And now that I am in relation to myself again, the work is now about letting others into my sacred space. Estrellx is challenging me to release patterns and narratives that are no longer serving me, including not taking myself too seriously, releasing mutual exclusivity (I can be both spiritual and sexual-erotic), to be okay with getting messy, awkward, as I ask for what I need. This work is daily, subtle, and incremental. The process of edging towards myself is an erotic process in and of itself and is requiring a disentanglement from who I thought I was.

## VII.

I’ve been taking a class called Living Systems with an instructor named Leah Garza who offers many spiritual support systems including Akashic Readings. The course is about examining one’s conditioning, unpacking universal laws, and pulling apart the systemic oppressive layers that bind us to this reality and one another. As part of the course, Leah integrates guest speakers and one of them was a Central American curanderx named Koyote the Blind. Towards the end of his lecture, Koyote asked our class to introduce ourselves without any of the accolades or identity markers we would usually include.

[So my initial response was going to be, “Hi, my name is Estrellx Supernova, I prefer they/them pronouns and these pronouns are non-negotiable. I’m currently living on unceded Tongva territories aka Los Angeles. I am the Cosmic Energetic Orchestrator / Founder of an ecosystem called The Cosmic Angels / The School(s) of Tenderness and am also a choreographer, writer, performer, healer, curator. Most recently, I was awarded a 2020 Creative Capital Grant for a project titled *EncuentrX 33: Queer Neurocognitive Architectures Hidden in Plain Site(s)* whose timeline I will be stepping into soon. A challenge I have been facing lately has been the perpetual feeling of exhaustion coming from the collective energy along with the puzzle I’ve been trying to crack around my material health and abundance. Something I want to celebrate is having pulled off the first IRL healing-based artist residency I designed called *Residencias Rhizomatica* (w/ the support of many thought partners including Tossie Long, Megan Kendzior, and María Wethers amongst others) in LA this past January/February. I trusted my gut to follow-through with the IRL vision even in the midst of COVID-19 and trusted the cohort and I would be protected. The cohort who gathered around and felt called in by the theme of inhabiting paradox have become a new expression of home for me. Because of them, I feel more empowered to open my heart, heal my relationship to collaboration, and trust in my capacity to facilitate, communicate, and hold space. The feedback I’ve been receiving has left me feeling in awe, with a heart full of gratitude, that the work I am putting out into the world is needed even in the moments when it has felt like no one is listening. I want to be in this rhizomatic world more and more consistently and unapologetically. This is what I’m co-creating daily. I **know** another way of being is

possible and it requires resources, collaboration, and active divestment from limiting beliefs on all levels, in all dimensions, right here, right now. I am co-creating a space and reality where Black, Indigenous, Queer, Trans, Allied Creatives get to come together to commune, dance, express ourselves on our own terms, inviting in a perpetual state of liberatory and erotic energetics into the center of our hearts. I wish to do this without becoming a martyr, without forgetting my own needs, without making myself small because there is space for all of us simultaneously.”]

[The Koyote version, “I was looking up at the stars one evening and became so moved. Without a doubt in my mind, I could sense that my true home was up there in the cosmos. I texted my friend and told them this and they texted me back with a smiling emoji. ‘And so it is...That is your home,’ they said. I’ve spent a lot of my life thinking that I was broken, fragmented, irreparable because of the trauma I experienced as a child AND because the U.S. never felt like home nor did Guatemala. Now I’m aware that this belief actually benefits the colonial powers, which is shifting something in me. I realize that the medicine of my Ancestors, their presence, blessings, magic is in my DNA, bones, imprinted into me through each inhale and exhale I make therefore I am never disconnected. Even if they kill me, this wisdom and medicinal pattern will move forward into my next manifestation. My Spirit remains untouchable. I am understanding more and more that there are multiple Diasporic lineages that weave through me and I can tap into this

felt like warm flashes of joy and iridescent waterfalls moving through my body. Welcome Home! Welcome Home! I had finally arrived.

When I was in Amsterdam this past fall, I asked the Universe for guidance on whether I was meant to stay in the EU or shift elsewhere and like a bolt of lightning Tongva/Los Angeles came through...again. What is it about this landmass that calls me back? What needs to complete itself here in the state of California? Is it my process of rebirth? The West is the site of Death, where the sun sets.

I bring my body to a stillness, with my ear to the ground, listening to what the land has to share with me.

The Earth whispers, “Each of us is specifically designed to activate specific places on the planet. Your mission is to carry forward the frequency of the new paradigm through everything that you do, which is rooted in unconditional love. Your purpose is to be and be free and feel free to move as often as you need. To play, simmer in pleasure, and move towards your full body YES.”

We are either gently moved towards or forced to shift into these locations. The Tower Card is always present with its tough love energy that is guiding us ever so swiftly towards Death and The Star combined. What needs to die in order for you to be reborn? Name it. And let it go. No matter what, we are imbued with agency and power to make

## When I arrived on Tongva territory for the first time, I was immediately energetically embraced by the land.

multiplicity and create home anywhere I go, anywhere I am called to. Everywhere I go I thrive. Home is emergent, nomadic, effervescent and I experience it in the smiles of strangers, in colors and lighting, in the way food is made with love.”]

## VIII.

When I arrived on Tongva territory for the first time, I was immediately energetically embraced by the land. I had never experienced anything like this before. It

choices that bring us into and out of states of alignment, disorientation, and timelines. Getting lost and delayed are inherent to the process and master plan. Choices that bend possibilities and potentialities in and out of focus.

So how do we create home and stability in the midst of so much cataclysmic transformation? How do we create stability when climate crisis, multiple pandemics, and an impending war continue to threaten any notion of stability? What is the direction I / we can always move towards that will never lead me / us astray? How can we think short- and long-term at the same time?



Inward.  
Turn to your practices.  
Turn to what brings you joy and what makes you feel DELICIOUS.  
Turn and face inwards, they say.  
WE HAVE TO GO NOW! MOVE!  
Move and surrender into the depths of yourself until you are born anew, molded through the power of your vision, distilled into the finest elixir that flows and flows and flows.

Home is a nest that has all of the things I have ever owned, including journal after journal after journal of notes, feelings, emotions that I’ve carried since 2004. Truly, my most prized possessions, some of which I’ll offer to the medicine of the fire.

The Redwoods are the place where I want my ashes laid to rest and isn’t death just another beginning? An energetic exchange between this plane and where we originally come from?

No, but “Where are you *really* from?”

It was a healing retreat that first brought me out to California, to the Santa Cruz mountains back in 2016, via an organization called Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!). My life was forever changed, imprinted, awakened. I also fell in love. It’s almost

ography, and performance as my mediums for expression and execution of ideas. They are forms that have held me through the hardness and forms that will continue to create space for me to metabolize, grieve, rest, and release.

I am grateful for the sanctuary of the dance studio, my faithful friend and abode. I can stay inside a dance studio forever and speak with the space to see what it needs from me. Dance studio as church, as a clean slate, as club space where I come to surrender and wrestle with whatever is at the surface, with whatever is alive for me in the moment. It is a site of generative dissonance where I can play with plasticity and elasticity and mold myself into whomever I desire, where I can express the things that I’ve silenced, and perform the future in the now. This space is what makes time travel possible. It is a space where I am able to move with various artistic and ancestral lineages all at once.

A fractal within a fractal within a fractal.  
An embodied tessellation.  
When are we ever not time traveling?

Therefore, I am never alone.  
We are never alone.

The Quantum Field embraces, moves through, and witnesses / archives everything.  
I’ve been there though. Sunken into the belief that I was destined to be alone. Sinking into that dark abyss where

there, but from BOTH, from the heavens, born out of celestial bodies, because this question of home is like any other question: not meant to be answered immediately. No need to create a chasm where there doesn’t need to be one. No need to buy into the illusion of separation.

Chew on it.  
Spit it out.  
Let the pieces dry out in the sun and see what new messages arise for you.

What if...  
There is nothing to solve.  
There is nothing to fix.

It is through compassionate awareness that the patterns and wounds shift.

What makes you angry?  
What if anger becomes home?  
What if any emotion makes its home inside of you for longer than it needs?

Move slowly.

What have you created an identity around and where is it located in your body?  
Who are you when you let those identities and narratives go?  
Who taught you to be afraid of your gifts?

Move slowly.

It is time to source the courage and become the person who fully and unapologetically embodies the energy you have been afraid of your entire life.

Move slowly.

Home is created in the moment by those who choose to show up for one another and who decide to use whatever is available to them to create a support system that can withstand any storm.

No need to give any explanation.  
You are welcome to come exactly as you are.

To come through and luxuriate in the power of presence, in the power of the breath of life that pulses through each one of us, through the drum beats of the heart.

Thank you, heart. Thank you, heart. Thank you, heart. Thank you, body. Thank you to all of the trillions of cells that comprise my body. Thank you to all of the microorganisms within my microbiome that comprise and inform my intuition, perception, consciousness.

I create a home where it is safe and possible to speak my truth, where it is safe and possible to make love again, where it is safe and possible to dream bigger and bigger knowing, where it is safe and possible to dissent, ask questions, say NO, ask for more time, ask for space, trusting that we all have equal access to this spaciousness.

Space, more space...there is more space in this body.  
Space, more space...there is more space in this body.  
Space, more space...there is more space in this body.

Let those around you surprise you.  
Surprise yourself.  
Spit it out!

Choose to react and respond differently.  
Take your time.  
Let the noise settle.  
Let the silence rattle you from within and allow its presence to give way to clarity of direction illuminating where you need to be.

Home is within you.  
Home is in the choices you make or don’t make.  
Home is the things you didn’t get to say.  
Home is wherever you decide to go.  
Home is now.  
You are never disconnected.

On my 30th birthday, I called my parents and my dad said, “Remember that the only one imposing limitations on you and what you think is possible for your life is **you**.” My heart cracked open and I have not been the same ever since.

**ESTRELLX SUPERNOVA** (they/them) is a queer, non-binary AfroIndigenous choreographer, performer, and healer whose roots extend into Guatemala/Belize, Angola, Portugal/Spain and other diasporas. Estrellx is the Founder of an entrepreneurial and emergent ecosystem called Estrellx Supernova & The Cosmic Angels / The School(s) of Tenderness. Estrellx integrates club spaces as sites of generative dissonance and implements [task as meditation, divergent simultaneity, Qi Energetics, divination, and somatic work] into their ritualistic performative language. Estrellx frames choreography as embodied excavation and asks, “What do you really want and how exactly do you want it? Are we celebrating or mourning or both? How do we work with what we have to redesign how we do everything? How do we prepare for the not yet seen?” [IG: [@corporealidades.sutiles](#)]

Move and surrender into the depths of yourself until you are born anew, molded through the power of your vision, distilled into the finest elixir that flows and flows and flows.

as if the Redwood grove had been waiting for me to arrive. I could tell that sacred magic had happened there prior to my arrival. This retreat marked the very beginning of my turning inwards and facing the parts of myself that I had banned and deemed unworthy of love. The sensation and feeling of exorcizing trauma out of my body during this retreat is one that I’ll never forget, that I’m forever grateful for, and bringing into everything that I do moving forward.

What does it mean for a place to acknowledge and open its arms towards us? What other forms of communication exist and are available to us outside of the verbal-English-dominated paradigm? This is why I continue to be with and integrate movement, chore-

the only person I could scream out for was my mother who was thousands of miles away. I’m certain now that she could hear my cries and was moved to pray for me.

The darkness. This is home too. Because it is through fecundity, that growth makes its way towards the light.

Exchanging  
Exchanges  
Exchange  
The exchange of fluids, of energy, of glances, of the gays and *the* gaze.

I am at home within my own definition of what it means to be queer, of what it means to be neither from here nor from



# Noorani DANCE

ENLIGHTENING MINDS AND HEARTS THROUGH THE ARTS

Founded & Directed by  
*Farah Yasmeen Shaikh*

TRADITIONAL & INNOVATIVE PERFORMANCES  
of Kathak on stages across the globe

UNIQUE  
COLLABORATIONS

across the performing arts

TRAINING FOR  
students of all ages

HEARTISTRY  
Talk Show & Video Series  
hosted by  
Farah Yasmeen Shaikh



NOORANIDANCE.COM

FROM STREETS CORNERS TO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES  
WE SPECIALIZE IN MULTIFACETED EVENTS, AND EXPERIENCES  
THAT PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR CONNECTING PEOPLE,  
SHARING IDEAS, AND CREATIVE EXPLORATION.

Engage Afro Urban Society's community of creatives

for memorable Afro-Urban Culture Experiences



## Book Us!

For booking & info: [afrourbansociety.com](http://afrourbansociety.com)



@afrourbansociety



# C<sup>IN</sup>COMMUNITY

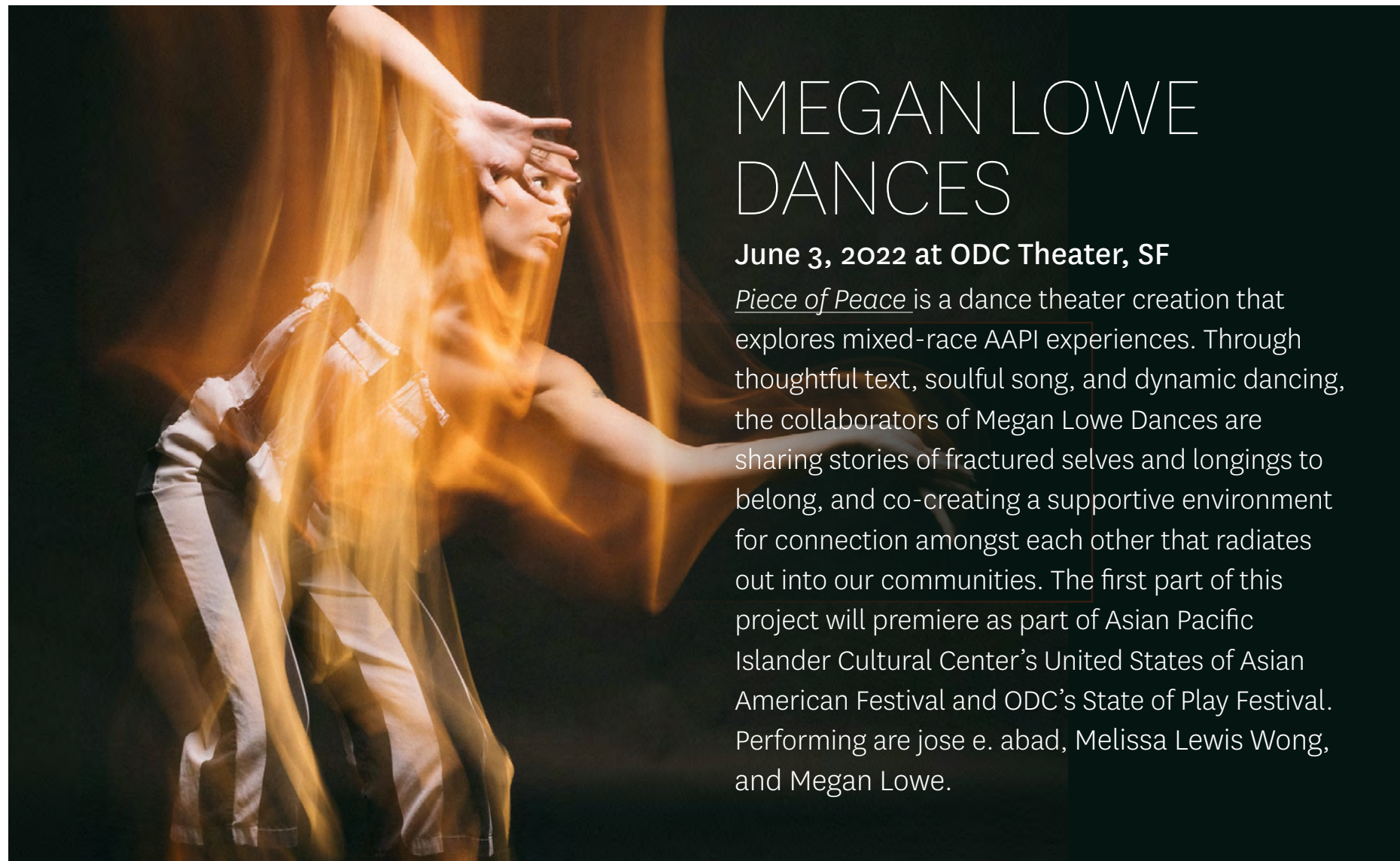


PHOTO COURTESY OF MAURICE RAMIREZ

## MEGAN LOWE DANCES

June 3, 2022 at ODC Theater, SF

*Piece of Peace* is a dance theater creation that explores mixed-race AAPI experiences. Through thoughtful text, soulful song, and dynamic dancing, the collaborators of Megan Lowe Dances are sharing stories of fractured selves and longings to belong, and co-creating a supportive environment for connection amongst each other that radiates out into our communities. The first part of this project will premiere as part of Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center's United States of Asian American Festival and ODC's State of Play Festival. Performing are Jose E. Abad, Melissa Lewis Wong, and Megan Lowe.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUSTIN FORBORD

## FLYAWAY PRODUCTIONS

[Flyaway Productions](#) has published a book! Photos and essays that document [Meet Us Quickly With Your Mercy, Part II of the Decarceration Trilogy](#), 2021.



PHOTO BY ANI SOUSANECHO

## DANCE-A-VISION

[Dance-A-Vision Entertainment](#) recently moved to their new home at Westfield San Francisco Centre! Under the Beautiful Historic Dome, Carla Service will continue to cultivate dancers by providing instruction in hip hop, jazz, African, contemporary, and more. Learn more about their upcoming classes, pop-ups, and performances



COURTESY OF CHRISTINE JOY AMAGAN FERRER

## THE DIVINE COLORING BOOK

Created, authored, and designed by Christine Joy Amagan Ferrer (a.k.a. Tine), *The Divine* is a multicultural 100-page coloring book for people of all ages inspired by folklore and spirituality from the Philippines (Diwatas), Haiti (Lwas of Vodou) and Brazil (Orixás of Candomblé and deities of the Indigenous Brazilian Tupi Tribe). Thirteen divinities from each culture are represented, along with the folklore and symbolism associated with each of the divinities. Hardcover and PDF versions available. Special 10% off hardcover! Enter coupon code: [eyeamthatiam](#). [Learn more](#)

Save-the-Date for The Divine Experience on Sep 10 at Kapwa Gardens in SF.

## TOUCH BASS

Sep 10-11, 2022 at Berkeley Art Museum Pacific Film Archive

Risa Jaroslow & Dancers' *Touch Bass* premiered at ODC Theater in 2017. It will be remounted for the spectacular space at BAMPFA. An ensemble of nine, including three dancers, three musicians, and three double basses, all move and make music. The bass score is by bassist/composer Lisa Mezzacappa.

## WIRED

May 2022, Chicago

Kinetic Light will premiere an aerial performance that explores the race, gender, and disability stories of barbed wire. Free livestream at [mcachicago.org](#)

## REBECCA FEDER FLAMENCO

[Classes in Flamenco dance](#) at Sherrie's Dance Studio, El Sobrante.

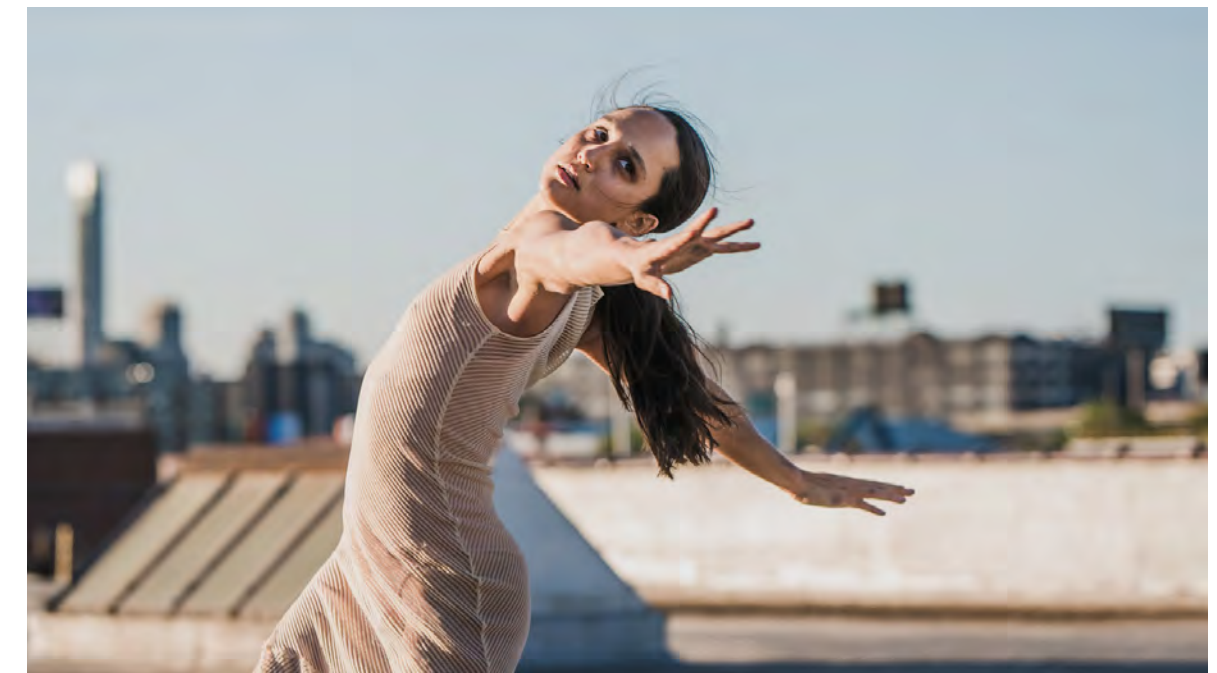


PHOTO COURTESY OF EFTY GREY

## ISABEL UMALI

Dance artist Isabel Umali was a [resident](#) with Deborah Slater Dance Theater in early 2022. Her resulting piece *Shift/Loss* explores the internal journey of change and discovery through the lens of myth, archetype and image as a way to access the subconscious. Danced by Umali with music by Dustin Carlson, we dive into one woman's internal world as she integrates her disparate parts. Isabel has also been teaching "The Hotspot" classes at ODC for professional dancers, and "Sensorial Dancing" for all levels at Shawl-Anderson. [Learn about Isabel's practice.](#)



PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWENNY

## Kinetic Light

Founded by Alice Sheppard, [Kinetic Light](#) is a disability arts ensemble, working at the intersections of disability, dance, design, identity, and technology. They promote intersectional disability as a creative force and access as an aesthetic critical to creating transformative art and advancing the disability arts movement.





PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIO MORITZ

## RISA JAROSLOW & DANCERS

### Talking Circle

May 12-22, 2022 at CounterPulse, SF

Six people gather to make a difficult decision that will affect all of their lives. Their dilemma raises the question: What is the freedom you long for and what will you risk to get it? The cast includes six movement collaborators ages 26-78. The score is by Amy X Neuburg.

## THE KENDRA KIMBROUGH DANCE ENSEMBLE

Our studio has recently launched a line up of 12 classes and workshops offered both in-person and online! For pre-registration, please check out our [website](#). If sales have ended online, feel free to drop into class the day of, or email us for virtual access. Stay tuned for more events and productions this year as we honor our 25th Anniversary season!

[KKDE Promotional Compilation](#)  
[Review of 2021](#) courtesy of KKDE Videographer

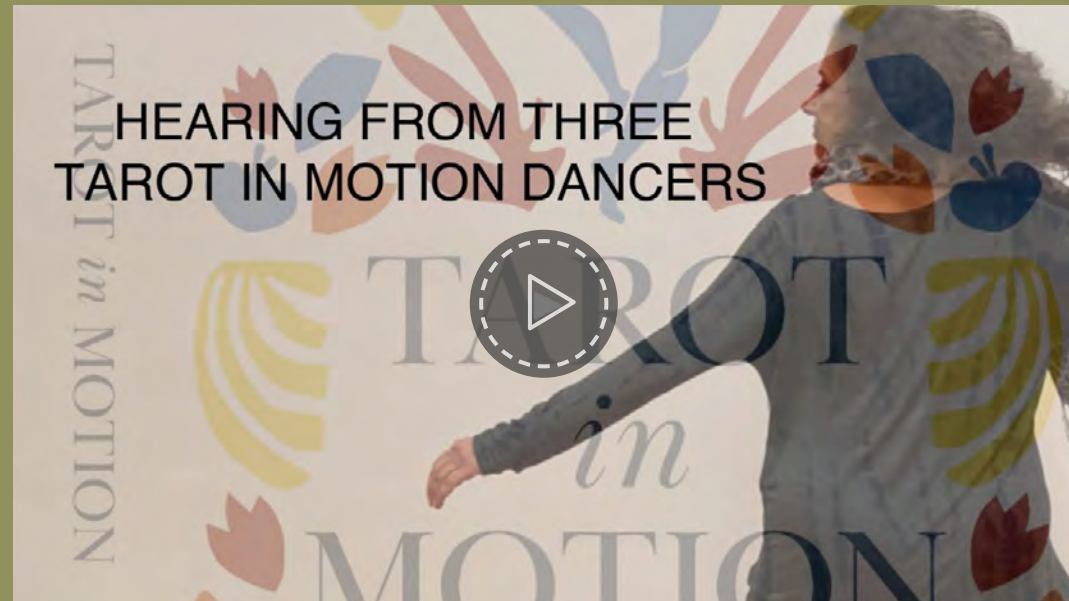


PHOTO COURTESY DEBORAH SLATER DANCE THEATER

## STUDIO 210

[Studio 210](#) is available to rent for performances, classes, and rehearsals, along with hosting the Summer Residency Program. Two artists will be in residence from June-July, with a culminating performance on July 29 & 30.

## HEARING FROM THREE TAROT IN MOTION DANCERS



## POLARITY WELLNESS

### Tarot in Motion

Create cathartic movement pieces from pulled Tarot cards.



COURTESY OF MOVEMENT LIBERATION

## MOVEMENT LIBERATION

Dance and Rest Retreat for People of African Descent

June 17-19, 2022, River's Bend Retreat Center, Philo CA

Spend Juneteenth with facilitators Dominique Cowling, Valerie Chafograck, and Sarah Crowell for a weekend of conscious dance, yoga asana, rest, and connection. Supported by the wisdom and purity of the natural world, this in-person retreat invites us all into a state of rejuvenation and nourishment. We have 20 full scholarships and sliding scale tuition available. If you can pay full price, please do so in order to support those who cannot at this time. [Register here](#).

## GUO PEI: COUTURE FANTASY

April 16, 2022 at Legion of Honor, SF

Megan Lowe Dances will be performing for the opening day of [Guo Pei: Couture Fantasy](#), which celebrates the extraordinary designs of Guo Pei. Through exquisite craftsmanship, lavish embroidery, and unconventional dressmaking techniques, Guo Pei creates a fantasy that fuses the influences of China's imperial past, decorative arts, European architecture, and the botanical world. Performing with Megan will be Sonsherée Giles, Frances Sedayo, and Shira Yaziv.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAURICE RAMIREZ



Strengthening Communities.  
Catalyzing Inclusion.  
Cultivating Belonging.

MOSAICAMERICA.ORG



DISCOVER MORE  
about Dancers' Group and past *In Dance* Articles

FOLLOW US

