



FALL 2022

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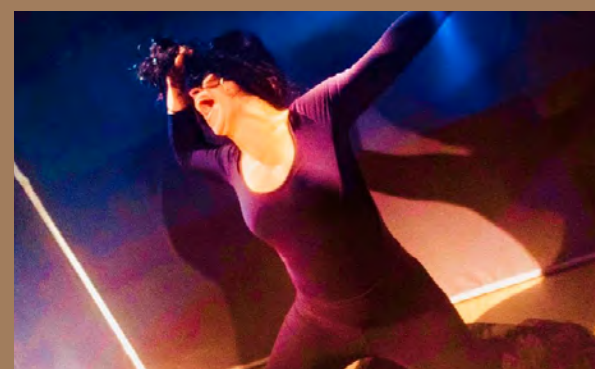
DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.18 Legends Walk Among Us



P.42 Afro-Peruvian Resilience



P.54 "Post-artum" Depression

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WELCOME

by [ROWENA RICHIE](#), Guest Editor



A BIG RIG OVERTURNED RECENTLY, spilling an estimated 300,000 tomatoes, massively jamming the freeway. “I heard it happened near Sauce-a-lito,” the traffic reporter quipped, “That driver should be canned.” (Thankfully no one was crushed). My first thought was, how can I incorporate this arresting imagery into my welcome note? I love a mash-up.

Roll out the red carpet for a Fall crop of articles that dance—in the juiciest, largest sense—between superstar celebrities and legends unknown. As guest editor, I invited an array of folks

from the community to contribute essays about what is moving them in this moment. The result is a smorgasbord of pieces that provide food for thought and sustenance for the soul.

As the writers sent me their drafts, I'm struck by possible “essay pairings.” Like with wine or food; complementary and contrasting combinations and flavors to heighten the enjoyment each component brings to the whole experience.

In this issue you'll find notes of released shame and embodied pride, mind altering in-between spaces, bridges to belonging, revered ancestry, entwined traditional and contemporary practices, healing nurses, gambling muses and parallel universes.

You might consider pairing Dasha Yurkevich's essay about discovering choreography with Brian Thorstenson's essay about exploring new ways of writing. Then again—Dasha's experience with ballet's body-type rigidity may also pair well with Melissa Hudson Bell's article celebrating Lizzo; Brian's investigation of the space between dance and theater may complement Constance Hale's article about gender fluid māhū people, or Antwan Williams' reflections on feeling free/not free all at once. And there's so much more on the menu—nourishing, refreshing, complex. Try them all!

After you've had time to digest, drop me a line and tell me what moved you: richierowena@gmail.com. I'd love to catsup.

Rowena

PHOTO BY ENIKA CHONG SHUCH

CONTENTS

12 / A Movement of the Spirit

by Brian Thorstenson

18 / Legends Walk Among Us

by Liv Schaffer

22 / Stepping Into the In-Between

by Constance Hale

28 / Every Second

by Antwan Banks Williams

34 / Passing

by Dasha Yurkevich

39 / Watch Out for the Big Grrrls

by Melissa Hudson Bell

42 / Afro-Peruvian Resilience and Empowerment Through the Dance Son de los Diablos

by Carmen Román

46 / Leaning into the Unexpected

by Haley Baek

50 / A Sense of Belonging Among Ever-Changing Circumstances

by Claudine Naganuma

54 / What is “Post-artum” Depression?

By Parya Saberi, PharmaD, MAS, MFA

58 / Decolonizing Industries of Care: Nursing These Wounds

by Joyce Lu

64 / Dance is in the DNA of the Universe

by Oscar Peñaranda

69 / In Conversation with Tonya Amos and Sarah Bush

by Andréa Spearman

72 / In Community

Highlights and resources, activities and celebrations for our community—find more on dancersgroup.org

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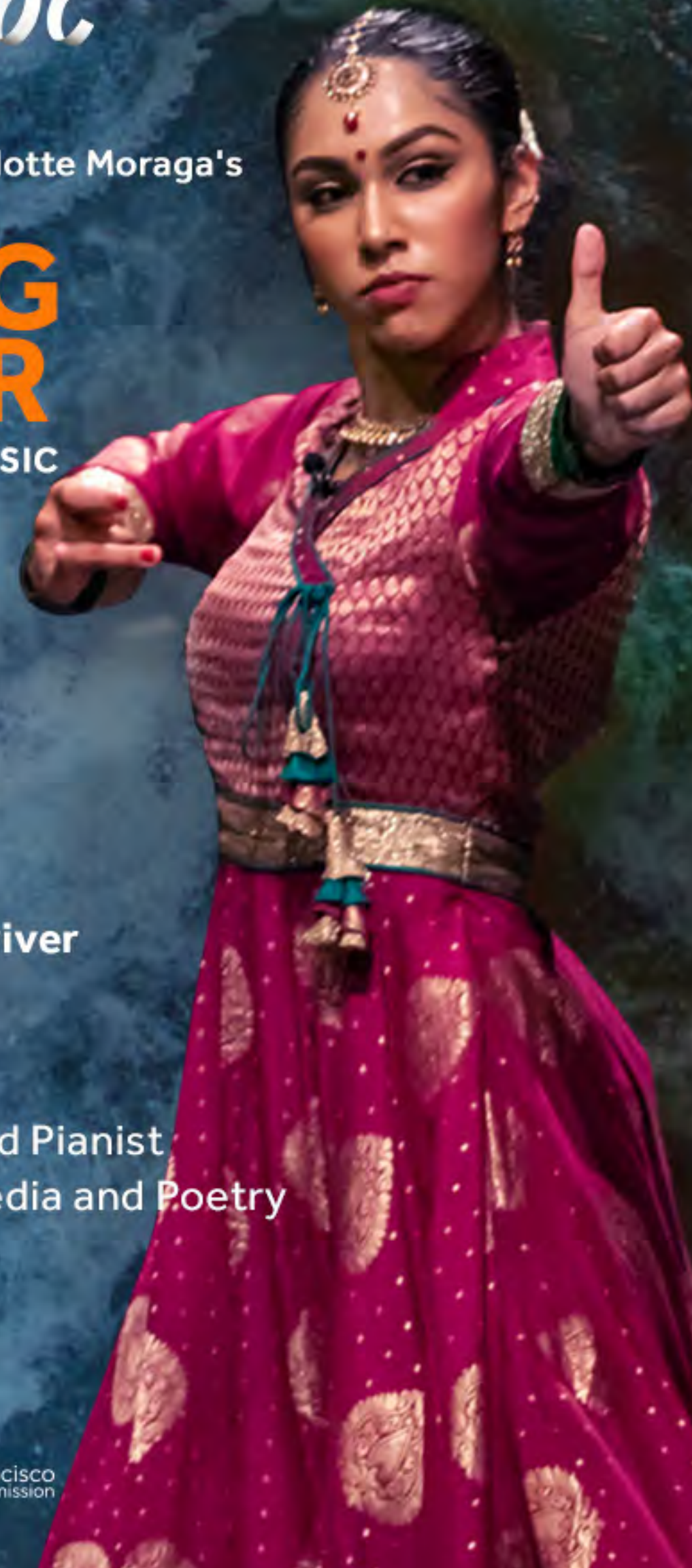
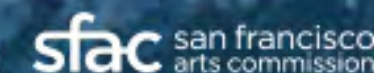
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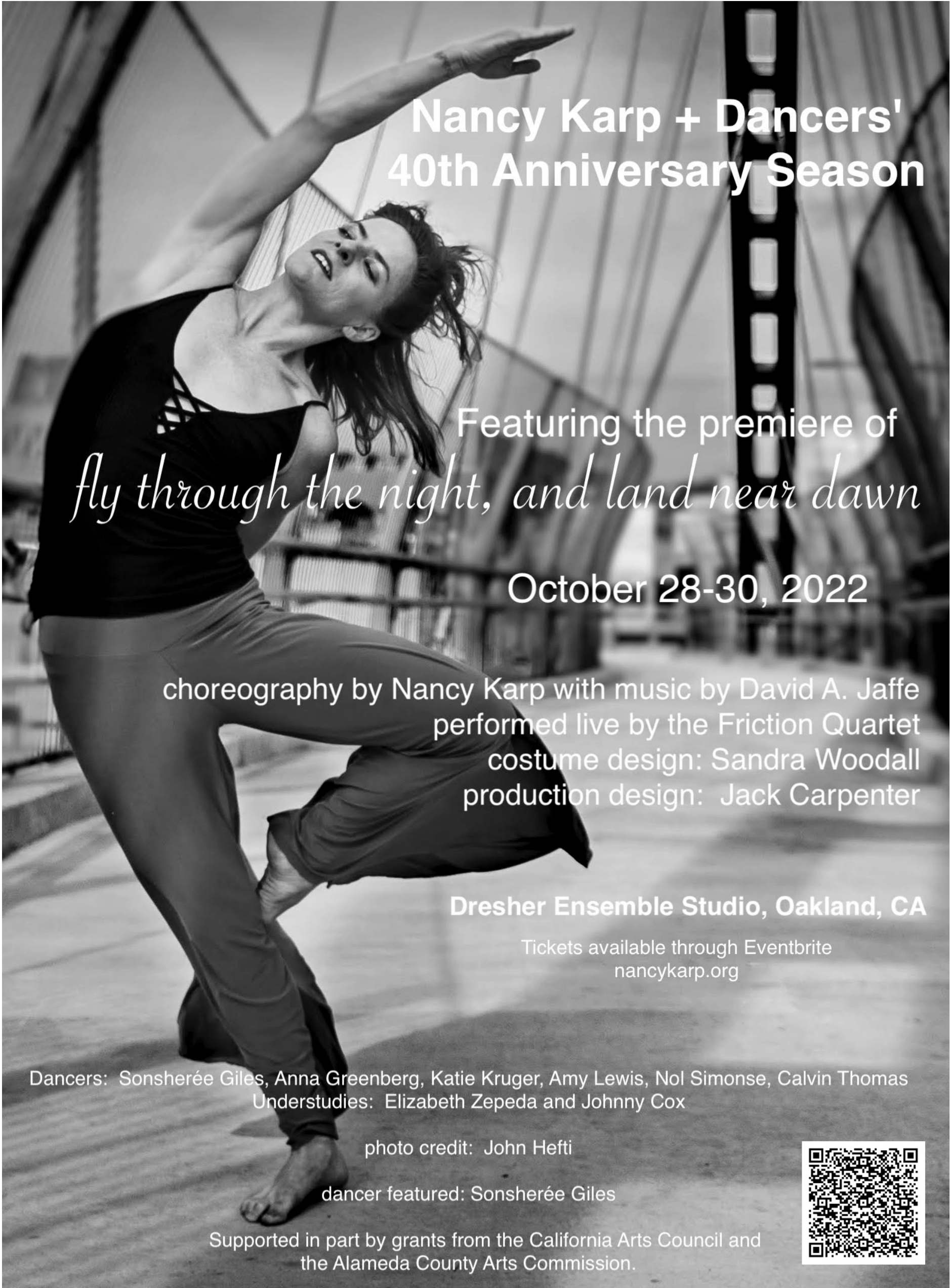
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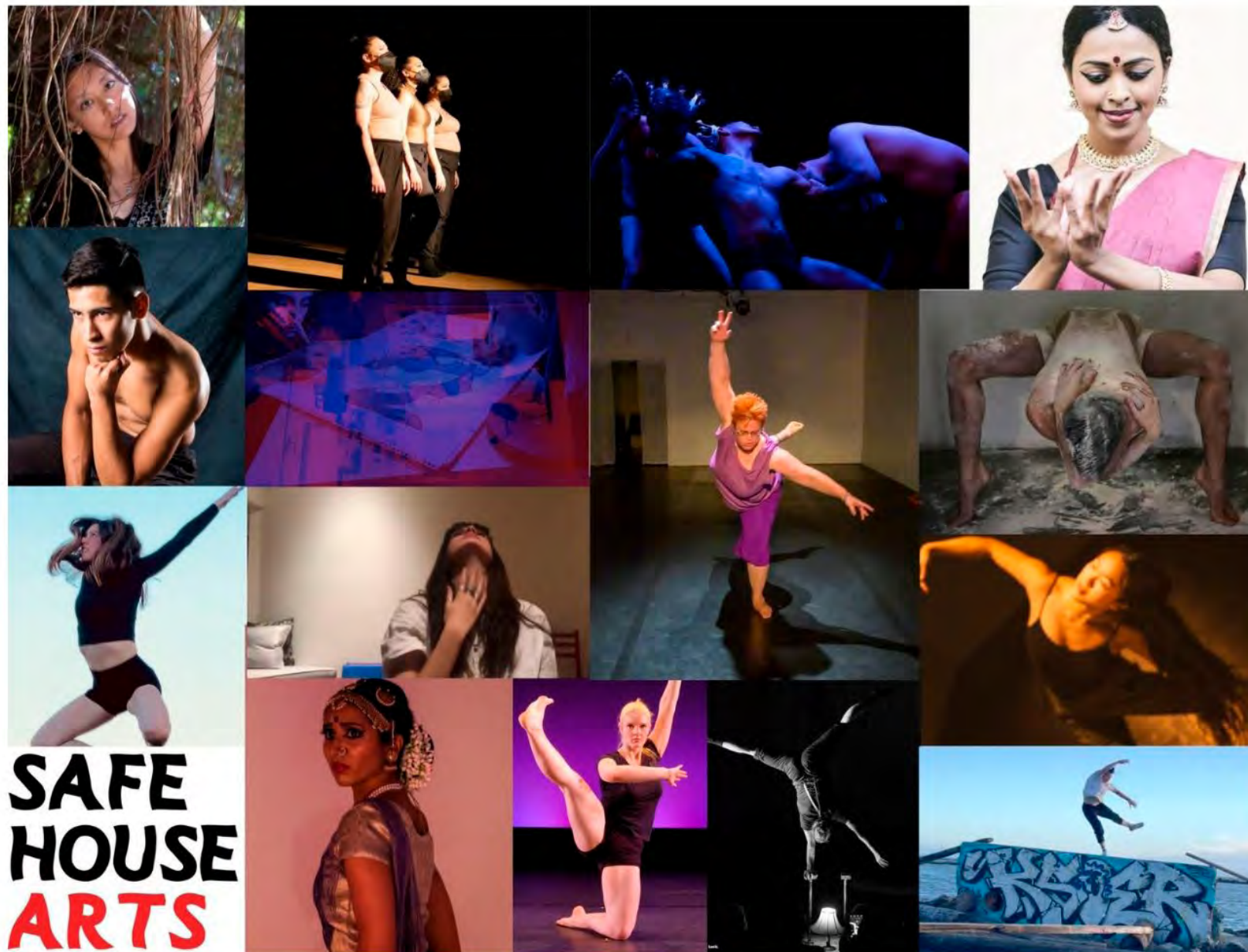
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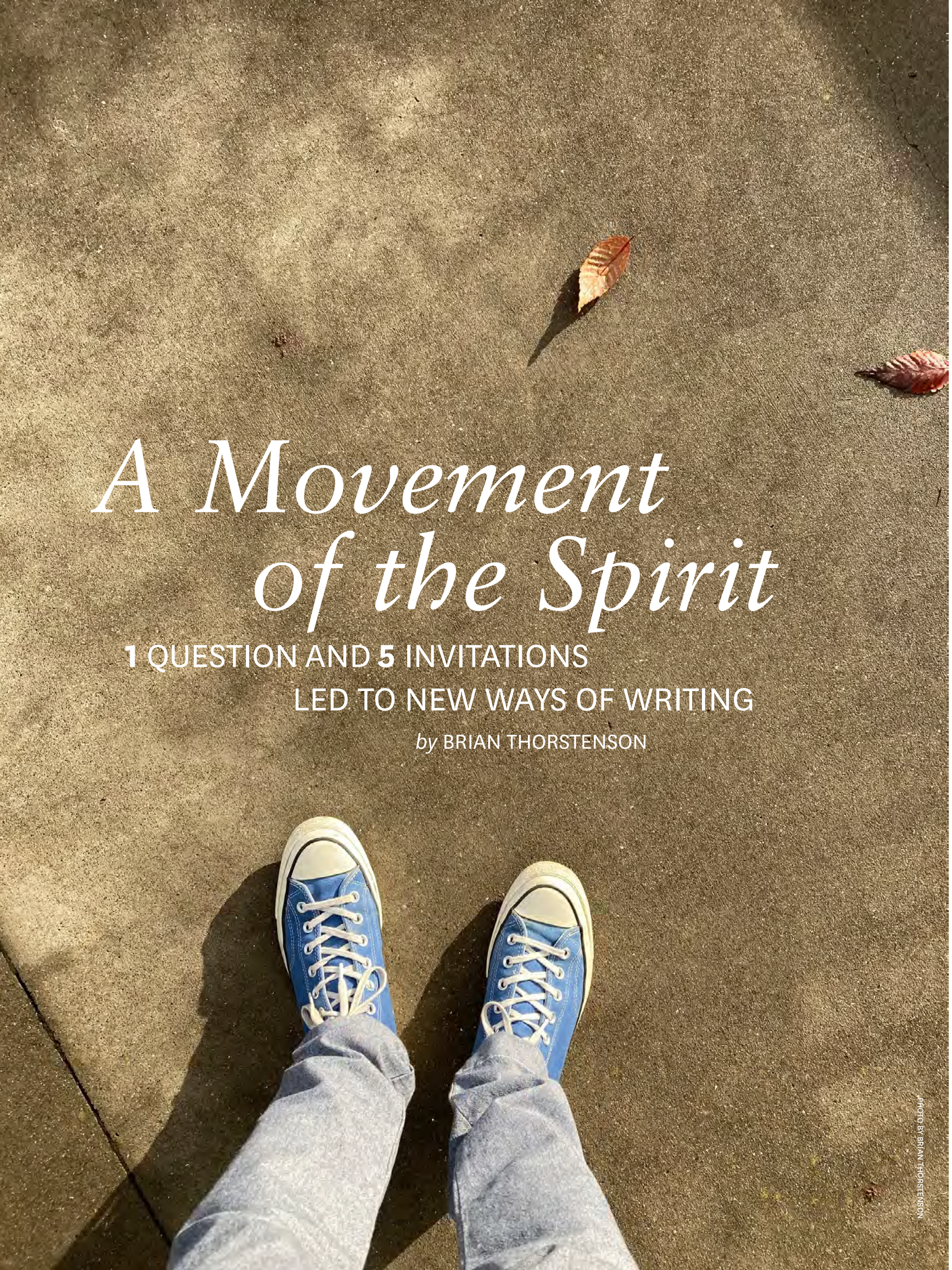
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A Movement of the Spirit

1 QUESTION AND 5 INVITATIONS

LED TO NEW WAYS OF WRITING

by BRIAN THORSTENSON

I HAD BEEN SITTING WITH A QUESTION.

What is a play?

For a little over ten years writing plays was my main creative expression. I didn't want to write another play. I wanted to start blank. Start with not knowing.

Every character wants something. It's what I tell my beginning playwriting students. That's the character's action. Replace action with need. Replace with desire, with longing.

Dante called action 'a movement of the spirit.'

What was going to move my spirit?

I didn't know.

So I sat. I waited.

A set of stage directions:

Silence.

A day? Two days?

A week? or three?

A year?

Yes. Try a year.

The phone rings.

Or maybe an email?

THE FIRST INVITATION. It was Erin Mei-Ling Stuart. ‘I’m working on a new project. Would you consider writing for it? Could we meet for coffee to discuss?’ Yes! An easy yes. An immediate yes. A movement of the spirit.

We met at a high table in the Church Street Café. I had worked with Erin when she was dancing with Stephen Pelton Dance Theater. I had seen the work of her own company EmSpace. I was a fan. Still am. Only more so. Erin had the characters, the structure, and the music for a new piece called *Whether to Weather*. She had, what a playwright would call,

I walk when I’m stuck with a writing problem. Around the block, up to the Castro and back, to visit a friend. The problem almost always gets solved on one of these walks. The walking also prompts new work, a poem, a monologue, a new scene. Walking as a two-way street.

‘the given circumstances.’ Two gay couples. One a whirlwind romance, the other a long term relationship, unraveling. The whirlwind would be danced, the unraveling would be text and movement.

So I began again. So we began.

A first meeting, around Erin’s kitchen table, with Wiley Namen Straser and Soren Santos, the performers who would be unraveling. To hear some words out loud. To see what stuck. To put some language in motion. I had taken a different

approach from my normal process: start with some characters, a setting, and write the play chronologically from beginning to end.

The first section was ‘Drought’ and I brought in five separate ‘Scenes from a Drought.’ One about their neighbors’ lush yard, another with silly word play. ‘The brick doesn’t go back into the bucket because the bucket goes into the bathtubshower.’ One about the focal rock in a rock garden. I thought of them as language phrases, the same way I had seen dancers make

phrases when generating material. Phrases to be used, or discarded. Rearranged or recomposed. It was a liberating way to begin, the freedom of non-attachment. We read the scenes. We talked. Erin suggested some edits (she is to this day one of the best editors of my work), then she said ‘What if we put three of them together as the first scene?’ What? Ok. Ah, yes, yes that really works. Who knew? And so I continued. So we continued.

I brought in language phrases, Wiley and Soren read them, Erin said yes, no, maybe. I’d return to my desk to rewrite/reshape after hearing them in rehearsal, after seeing the language moving. Erin thought of *Whether to Weather* as a play; I thought of it as dance theater. We navigated the space between. I brought in: ‘Raise my rain hand, swoon sun side’ and Wiley rose and swooned. I brought in an exit that was an ellipsis:

W

The horizon line of possibility, he says. He says: It’s gone.

He says:

W exits

S reaches back, but doesn’t find W.

The first time we tried it in rehearsal I turned to Erin: ‘That was pretty good, huh’ ‘Yeah, but he can play the ellipsis harder.’ She was right. Wiley could. And did. I brought in:

S

He was an open mouth target, a... he was ... he... our ... mine. He said: Lawn gone.

I watched Erin and Soren tackle each ellipsis, comma, semi-colon, period. In performance you could feel Soren find his way through those sentences. Punctuation is a detail, like the tilt of the head, or an arm circle, a hip ajar. This in between space we were navigating, between a play and a dance, heightened and highlighted the language and the punctuation. Working with Erin on *Whether to Weather* was the first time I experienced an intersection between my plays and my poems. Between my words and punctuation and how they made bodies move.

‘A play is a poem standing up.’

—Frederico García Lorca

A SECOND INVITATION. From Rowena Richie. ‘Wanna devise a new piece with me, Christy Funsch, and Chris Black?’ An easy yes, immediate. As with Erin, three artists who I had known for a long time, had worked with



before, or had seen their work. I was a fan. Still am. Only more so. We met off and on over the course of two years. Sometimes in a living room, sometimes in a studio. Once in the ‘community room’ of The Sports Basement, which wasn’t more than a sorta small balcony. We started with a quote from V (formerly Eve Ensler) from an episode of Krista Tippett’s *On Being* podcast.

‘I think I’m gonna go back to capitalism because I think what is engineered is longing. It is engineered longing and desire in us for what can be in the future, you know.’

—V (formerly Eve Ensler)

Longing. Desire. Action. We all brought in text, we all created movement (more than slightly terrifying for me being in the room with Chris, Rowena, and Christy!) We strung material together, tried it out, then met in a circle. No one ever said, as I do with my students, circle up, we just naturally put ourselves in that configuration.

‘Joining together in this way is a symbol of unity, for a circle has no beginning or end; all the points are equally significant.’

—Anna Halprin from *Planetary Dance*.

We’d review the string. Yes, No, Maybe. A problem? challenge? bumpy spot? would appear. We circled. Christy would offer the start of an answer, I’d add another thought, then Chris, then Rowena, not always in that order, but always a turn around the circle. By the time the turn was completed (a pirouette?) we had figured out the next step forward, answered the question, or discovered a new question. We found a title: *Dearly Gathered*. Through the multi-year process Rowena kept us on track



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN THORNTONSON

PHOTO BY BRIAN THORNTONSON



by keeping the piece ‘open’ as long as possible. Our final rehearsal was on a Wednesday, two days before our Friday and Saturday performances. Rowena came with a new order. We circled. We talked through the new order. We said yes. We could do this because of the amount of time we’d spent together. We could do this because we trusted each other. We could do this because of the extent of the ‘open.’ There’s an idea you will find in many playwriting books: as soon as you put the first line down on the page, the play in your head, some idealized version of the play, starts to disappear. Partly true but, as with many ‘how-to’ ideas, this one has always struck me as restrictive as opposed to expansive. What if, instead, each new line, each new beat, kept opening the play? Now, with all of my work, I attempt to stay open as long as possible.

What is a play? What is this play? Circle up and change the string.

THE THIRD INVITATION. From Eric Garcia. ‘Detour is doing a site-specific piece in the Mission called *Fugue*. Come join us as one of the writers?’ Yes. Easy. Immediate. I was a fan. Still am. Even more so. I would be writing for four ‘guides’ who would be taking small groups of the

audience on a walking tour through the Mission. Eric sent the routes for each of my guides. I walked the routes by myself, or with a couple of friends, looking for landmarks, for stopping spots. Looking for moments where my own memories collided with the route. Early in the devising process I walked the routes with Eric and my group of guides. Scott pointed out the back of a building where he used to live. Erin told me a story about a date at Radio Habana. Melissa brought her father’s camera. I added those moments into their monologues. I walked the routes during rehearsals. Arletta and I stopped on a small stoop and made revisions on the spot. In December I bundled up and joined each of the guides and walked the routes during performances. *Fugue* became a mediation of walking.

Walking. I love walking. Walking San Francisco is one of my favorite activities. I haven’t owned a car in over 30 years. I sold it because I felt disconnected to the city. I need to keep my feet on the ground. To wander, to be a flaneur, to understand what’s happening on this block or that street. And I walk when I’m stuck with a writing problem. Around the block, up to the Castro and back, to visit a friend. The problem almost always gets solved

on one of these walks. The walking also prompts new work, a poem, a monologue, a new scene. Walking as a two-way street. *Fugue* gave me another chance to write walking, and write walking with a group who freely shared their stories. Language phrases, staying open, layering in other voices, walking writing.

THE FOURTH INVITATION. From a group of five playwrights. ‘We’re going to produce one play by each member. Join us?’ Yes. Maybe not an emphatic yes, not because of the other playwrights – I was a fan. Still am. Even more so. – but from my own trepidation. Do I want to write another play?

I decided to revisit a piece, *Wakefield*, that I’d originally made with the wonderful folx at Central Works. I worked through the play chronologically but this time I tried to keep the piece open. I looked at scenes as phrases. I investigated layering through sound, music, light, and movement. I always put my plays ‘up on the wall.’ A page for each scene with a scene title. When they are up on the wall I can ‘walk’ through the play, I can rearrange scenes, I can make notes. During the rewrite I found new material: ‘One Minute of 20 Sounds’, ‘A First Burst of Red’, ‘Twenty Years: A Science Vaudeville.’

When I got to the final scene I wrote:

Twenty Moves

Twenty moves from the play.

Maybe they're in chronological order.

Maybe they aren't.

That is this: Let's try this whole night again.

That is also this: What's another version of tonight that we can make.

Music underneath.

Whatever the order is, it ends with Henry in the doorway, in the same position he was at the beginning and Sophia standing.

This was a complete surprise. I know it came from my work with choreographers. It’s my favorite moment from my plays.

Wakefield is a ‘two-hander’, shorthand for a play with two characters. I played the title character and my friend Anne Darragh played his wife Sophia. I decided to follow the Sunday Matinees with a ‘wrecking,’ a

process originated by Susan Rethorst. Dance Wrecking entails inviting colleagues to view your in-progress work, then granting them freedom to “wreck” it – rearrange, reorder and/or recast the piece from their own artistic perspective, and then show the resulting new piece. I had seen several wreckings. I wondered how it might work with a play. I asked Rowena and Chris to be the ‘wreckers.’ They took vastly different approaches, Rowena exploding moments, Chris having us do the whole play with only Sophia’s lines. I don’t think of *Wakefield* as a complete play unless I include the wrecked versions. The play itself worked with theme and variation, with repeat and revise. The two wrecked versions became a natural extension of the play’s structure while adding another layer of meaning.

THE FIFTH INVITATION. Last year. Again from Eric and Detour. A new site-specific project, *We Build Houses Here*, join us as the writer? Easy immediate yes. In August we began workshops for a spring opening at the Oasis nightclub. Another adventure. What new idea will be added to the list, to the wall, this time?

I’ve hesitated attaching a label to the artists I’ve mentioned. They’re all hyphenated. They call themselves by many names: deviser, dancer, choreographer, theatre maker, dance film maker, drag queen, actor, mover. They’ve all provided a space where I can be a writer of many names: generator, transcriber, collider, collator, poet, playwright. They’ve taught me to navigate the spaces between, spaces where I now mostly reside, that feel like home.

While I was writing this I came across some scribbled notes stuck in a file folder. At the top of a yellow legal pad: *Essay – working with dancers/choreographers*. It was notes from a conversation I had with Erin. They’re mostly illegible, quick scribbles, or cryptic phrases like ‘place in the funnel.’ But one section struck me, one section where my cryptic scribbles made me remember our conversation. I was asking Erin what she thought about when she was constructing movement. What were the questions? The parameters? Was it about narrative? Was it about character? ‘Sometimes it’s just the pleasure zone, a movement that gives me pleasure, that hits a kind of beauty spot.’ How glorious is that? A reminder that one part of art making is creating these moments of pleasure, these beauty spots. A movement of the spirit. Yes indeed.

BRIAN THORSTENSON is a San Francisco based writer, teacher and occasional performer. Brian was a founding member of The Z Collective and one of the first resident artists of the Z Space. He is an alumni of the Resident Playwright Program of the Playwrights Foundation and one of the founding members of 6NewPlays. His poetry has appeared in Foglifter, Burning House Press, Lambda Literary Review, and New American Writing. His next project, *We Build Houses Here* with [Detour](#), opens May 4 at the Oasis Nightclub. Brian is a Senior Lecturer in Playwriting and Devised Theater at Santa Clara University and has an MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIAN THORSTENSON

by LIV SCHAFFER

LEGENDS WALK AMONG US

A REFLECTION ON THE CYCLES WE DANCE, **GENERATION** AFTER **GENERATION**



recently met Ellen Webb when a colleague informed me that she owned a dance studio for rent insanely close to my West Oakland home. I had never heard of her, but arrived at a hidden backyard studio space that was adorned with faded posters illustrating her successful performances across the United States and Europe in the 1980s and '90s. I was intrigued by the fragility of it all; she seemed to have made it, but does her story sit in the background of the current Bay Area dance scene? "It was okay to do it, and okay not to do it," remarked Ellen, speaking on her time during and post her dance career. "It's a challenging thing for dancers – or it was for me...At one point, it just ends."

"She's a legend!" I thought to myself. I felt naive for not knowing about her.

Since 2018, I've focused my creative research on aging and intergenerational dance practices.

When people of different ages dance together, they unlearn the biases they previously had. They commit to

the to-be-expected passing down of anecdotes from older adults to youth, accompanied by youth driven surges of energy and excitement. And through dance that script gets flipped: Youths are natural leaders and teachers, and older adults allow their innovation and playfulness to gush from behind mountains of "the way things always were," like a flowing river that has been greatly anticipating the opportunity. There's permission to evolve from the way things were, and to reimagine how things might be—for everyone.

I also think there's deep learning about power and obedience in the dance studio. A reminder to get curious about a tradition if it's no longer serving you. A gentle challenge to the idea of one sole teacher, choreographer, or director at the front of the room. Like many forms of dance, dancing across generations works best in a circle versus in lines facing towards mirrors. I see it as a representation of the reality that time is non-linear. The circle can be time's equalizer, with a sense of all ages reflected in and around us, happening all at once.

I WONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE TO MAKE SOMETHING WITH THE AWARENESS OF KNOWING IT MAY BE THE LAST OF ITS KIND THAT YOU MAKE.

authentic responsiveness within physical and creative interactions between one another. There's a visceral sense for what it's like to cultivate belonging across divides. Experiencing belonging within a group of varied bodies and abilities exposes ageist and ableist ideals in the dance field, and teaches skills for dancing with an inclusive quality and spirit that challenges conventional notions of who is valued as a dancer. Thus, when we dance our values, intergenerational dance itself becomes activism, versus choreographing a piece about ageism.

For me, it's the multidirectionality that I'm drawn to most when working across generations. There is, of course,

[Celeste Miller](#), a linguistics-fascinated mentor and friend of mine, once shared that in English, as in many languages, we orient ourselves to the past as something behind us, and the future as what's in front of us or ahead. Some Arabic speakers, however, conceptualize the past as in front of us because we can see it and the future behind us, a mystery yet to be seen. The movement vocabulary, and thus language of intergenerational dance, allows us to grasp the complexity of looking backwards and forwards in time simultaneously.

When I watch a cast of age-homogeneous performers, time stands still. There is a deep sense of uniformity

and attunement among them. For a moment, I am suspended in their world and my own falls away. Satisfying. With an intergenerational cast, time moves in all directions. Past and future selves churning through time: generational time, time left to live, and time beyond our lives. I am not suspended in the performer's world of attunement, but instead sensing all of time, leaving me suspended in my own personal present.

To see an older body beside a younger body in performance is to face our own inevitable decline. And for me, it triggers some heart-wrenched urgency to seize each moment. I adore the way that aging bodies—something we societally associate with slowing down, declining health and frailty—can be a catalyst for increased speed towards our own vitality and thriving. I love the duality present in aging's reminders that none of this (life) matters, because none of us are getting out of this alive, but then very much simultaneously—*holy shit*, everything is sacred. Death is a choreographer, and she's commissioning all of us to let go enough to tumble through time—rhythmically, chaotically, and inevitably—while also preserving enough care and awareness to sanctify each ordinary moment.

I recently met Bill Haskell, age 77; the man responsible for overseeing the creation of the first AIDS hospice in the United States, in the mid-1980s, right here in San Francisco. We spoke on record for [StoryCorps](#) as board members of [San Francisco Village](#). Bill worked with the San Francisco Department of Public Health, participating in the development of the AIDS model, a model that increased access and quality of long-term care services and support for people with HIV/AIDS. Before he retired, he worked on developing long-term care and supportive services for all older adults and adults with disabilities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

I was stunned by the breadth of his work and the impact his work made both locally and globally. My mind



and heart flutter between honoring his heroic past and dreaming about what could remain undiscovered in his future. I wonder what responsibility dance has to tell the stories of the legends who shaped our world, who saved our world. Legends who walk among us.

Bill's work has that same sense of past-future duality and intergenerational multidirectionality I mentioned earlier. He sat with illness, death, and destruction of a community while also innovating new pathways for progress in long-term care.

I feel strongly that the ephemeral nature of dance is a rich training ground for acceptance of this kind of duality, and of our own temporality. Think about it: we rehearse for months or years for maybe a few weekends of performances that seem to fly by, and then dissipate the moment that final curtain closes. If we could view dance practice as death practice, would society find greater value in funding the arts? Would we feel more ready when things, personally or professionally, inevitably come to an end?

I remember asking Margaret Jenkins about what's next for her at this stage in her career. "My next piece, *Global Moves*, might be my last piece making work in this way, so it's a death of a kind," she told me over coffee. "But the process constantly informs...and continuing albeit differently, is a necessity!"

I wonder what it's like to make something with the awareness of knowing it may be the last of its kind that you make. I wonder if as artists we got lucky with the ability to constantly evolve our processes as a way to outrun our expiration—like a superpower of immortality that being a creative awards us. I wonder if it's possible to feel like a legend, not for what you've done, but for who you are now.

Perhaps creating space for older adult artists' voices is just a way to guarantee that I'll have belonging in this field as I age, too. Perhaps it's a way to try and live forever, despite my soap box for mortality.

Right around the time I was writing this article, the University of San Francisco welcomed students back to

campus for the start of the Fall semester. I was introduced to fresh faces, mostly 17 – 22 years-old, studying dance, theater, music, nursing, computer science, business, and engineering in my course on community engaged dance pedagogy. They seemed like a special bunch—vibrantly interested in learning new dances and connecting more deeply to their own communities. They are playful, passionate, and curious upon first impressions. "Hi & Welcome!" I beam with gusto from the front of the lecture hall, daydreaming about what their futures might entail. I smile at their hidden beauty and think to myself, "Legends walk among us."

LIV SCHAFFER is a Bay Area artist and educator with a focus on intergenerational practice at the intersection of dance and social impact sectors. She holds a degree from Alonzo King's LINES Ballet BFA Program at Dominican University of California and has performed with AXIS Dance Company, DanceWorks Chicago, Robert Moses' Kin, and Dance Exchange. Liv was a Shawl-Anderson Dance Center 2019 Emerging Artist in Residence, a 2020 Margaret Jenkins CHIME Mentee, 2021 USF Lane Center Faculty Fellow, 2021 USF Community Engaged Learning Teaching Fellow, and a 2021 Gen2Gen Innovation Fellow with [Encore.org](#).



Stepping into the In-Between

In his latest show, MĀHŪ, San Francisco hula master Patrick Makuakāne explores the Hawaiian concept of a fluid gender and an openness to the third self.

When ancient Hawaiian carvers would take material from the natural environment—whether a tree or a bone or a piece of stone—and then begin to shape it into a figure destined for a temple or other sacred place, they had a word for the unfinished work, the in-between entity: *māhū*. Outside of that ritual process, the word was also used in a different sense, to refer to people whose gender identity was fluid, neither *kane* (male) nor *wahine* (female).

But once missionaries arrived in Hawai‘i in 1820 with their Calvinistic properties, and once American culture overwhelmed Hawai‘i, the noun *māhū* lost its expansiveness. Today the wehewehe.org dictionary defines it as “homosexual” or “hermaphrodite.” And, unfortunately, it can be used in a downright pejorative sense.

That’s the *māhū* San Francisco Kumu Hula Patrick Makuakāne remembers from his teenage years in Hawai‘i, when he started to realize that he was gay. But attitudes are changing in the islands, much as they are nationally, and the groundbreaking choreographer aims to encourage us all to reimagine the term. To do so, he has invited outstanding *māhū* entertainers from Hawai‘i to collaborate with his company, [Nā Lei Hulu i ka Wēkiu](http://NāLeiHuluikaWekiu.com). And he will use his latest show, *MĀHŪ*, which premieres on October 22, to spotlight the unique Hawaiian concept of a fluid gender.

“Transgender issues are in the zeitgeist, and I was thinking of the many talented *māhū* people in Hawai‘i,” says Makuakāne, who wrote a grant proposal for the show in 2019 and has had to wait two years to be able to perform it. “I thought, What if I did a show with

BY CONSTANCE HALE

PHOTO BY PATRICK MAKUAKĀNE

transgendered artists who sang for us while we danced? I didn't want to take a political stance, per se. I just wanted to let people hear them sing and watch them dance, because their artistry is so powerful."

Yet Makuakāne acknowledges that celebrating such artists, and thereby celebrating the respect given to māhū people in ancient Hawaiian society, is inherently political. (There has never been a dance production or any kind of artistic showcase that has ever used that term in its name.) The show intends to move past the shame and ridicule that LGBTQ Hawaiians have endured by being labeled māhū. Instead it invites them to feel pride. Most important to him, though, is to "reclaim the idea of their authenticity and their humanity."

The concept of a third gender, where individuals can express both their masculinity and femininity freely, is not unique to Hawai'i. Parallels include *hijra* in Hindu society, two-spirit Native Americans, the *fakaleiti* or *fakafefine* of Tonga, and the *fa'afafine* of Samoa.

The show highlights three artists from Hawai'i who all fall under the hard-to-translate term māhū. Part One begins with Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, a hula master and leader in the field of indigenous Hawaiian language and cultural preservation. (She is also the subject of *Kumu Hina*, a 2014 documentary, and she co-directed *Kapaemahu*, an animated 2020 film based on the long-hidden history of four stones on Waikiki Beach honoring legendary māhū who brought the healing arts to Hawai'i.)

"Kumu Hina is a beautiful dancer and chanter with a resonant voice," Makuakāne notes. The segment in which she is featured will focus on *kahiko*, or the ancient style of hula, with Nā Lei Hulu dancers interpreting, for example, the story of Kapaemahu, the four māhū prophets/healers who traveled from Tahiti to Hawai'i around 400 A.D. Newly composed chants will tell the story, and the dancers will perform in the kahiko style, while dramatic costumes, lighting, and video projections will complete the kind of stunning visual display Makuakāne has become known for.

Following her is Kuini, a musical trio composed of Ho'omanawanui Apo, Kēhaulani Tamure, and Keli Māhealani Viernes. The three singers specialize in *leo kiekeie*, or Hawaiian falsetto. "They will knock you off your feet with their vocals and hairdos," says Makuakāne. "They're just incredibly witty and colorful, with vocal audacity and some of the most glorious harmonies you have ever heard in Hawaiian music."

This will be the *'auana* portion, showcasing the style of dance that may be most familiar to general audiences, in which light-hearted dances are choreographed to music featuring Western instruments, melodies, and vocal harmonies. Many popular *'auana* describe a 20th century life of firemen, streetcars, public parks, and even *pipi* (beef) stew. Part

The *Los Angeles Times* once compared the "ineffably smooth unison" of the Nā Lei Hulu dancers with "the best corps de ballet" and described a "lasting aftereffect something like having seen flowers that breathe and butterflies that think."

One of *MĀHŪ* closes with one such hula, "Hawai'i Isles Medley / E Ku'u Hawai'i"—or what Makuakāne refers to as the "bowling alley hula." The dancers appear in bowling ensembles, and they mime walking, talking, putting on shoes, and sending balls down onstage lanes. The dance is fun, mirthful, and a little madcap.

"My inspiration for this number was the bowling league I used to go to with my parents," he explains as I watch a rehearsal in a high school gym on Potrero Hill. Above the basketball court with its glistening polyurethane floors, high windows let in the bright August sunlight. "They bowled at Waialae Bowl," Makuakāne continues. "The league was called 'Hukilau,' and each team had the name of a different fish." (A *hukilau* is a Hawaiian tradition in which family and friends work together in casting a large fishing net from shore, scaring fish into it, and then pulling the bounty back for a communal feast. It is also the name of a popular hula.)

Part Two of the show features Kaumakaiwa Kanaka'ole, a scholar, activist, and performer born into a powerful matrilineal line of cultural experts and hula people on Hawai'i Island. "Her work is rooted in ancestral foundation, but the places that she goes—the voice, the melodies, the chord changes—she doesn't sound like anything else or anyone else," says Makuakāne. "She soars with contemporary ease."

That she doesn't sound like anyone else is hardly hyperbole. *The New York Times* described a performance of hers as a "traditionalist tour de force" in which Kaumakaiwa "vaulted through various registers and timbres, from bass to witchy contralto rasp to sweet soprano"—or what the singer called "skinny girl" voice.

For her part, Kaumakaiwa, who has transitioned from male to female, describes her power this way: "My body was genetically built to survive 9-12 months out on the open ocean, with a limited amount of resources and food, in order to maybe make it to arrive at some place called home, some place called Hawai'i, to a tiny little rock." She credits her grandmother with instilling in her a fearlessness about being who she is, and says that fearlessness allowed her "to say Yes to this show and to redefine status-quo hula."



PHOTO BY JOSUE ZAVALA

Kaumakaiwa’s off-the-charts music, which synthesizes the esoteric spirit of chanting with the beats of Michael Jackson and the vocals of Adele, is the perfect complement to *hula mua*, Makuakāne’s signature dance invention. The verb *mua* means “to progress,” and Makuakāne defines *hula mua* as dance that “takes from the past and brings to the future.” Its movements rely on the vocabulary of *‘auana* and *kahiko*, but the music is all over the map (including techno and pop and opera and everything in between). And many of the “traditional” movements are stylized—“tweaked and exaggerated,” with other movements occasionally mixed in—a little modern dance, maybe, a little Broadway, a little hip hop.

“We are taking hula to new places—not just physical places, but also artistic and emotional places,” he explains. “I’m broadening my context of hula, reminding us that tradition and innovation can coexist in meaningful and surprising ways.”

One example of hula mua in the show is the number “Lovely Hinahina,” which I watched at rehearsal in the gym, when rows of “rubber slippahs”—zoris and flip flops—marked out a stage on the basketball floor. The lyrical love song, written by Kaumakaiwa’s mother Kekuhi, describes the breeze “bearing witness” as the singer catches a glimpse of her dear lovely hinahina. The memory of her is “presented on wings feathered by the breeze,” a breeze that whispers and stirs my affections. The melody is hardly lyrical, though: the beat of the guitar, drums, and synthesizer—as well as the rapid fire chanting—it is made urgent and visceral.

For thirty minutes, 23 dancers, in two flocks, practiced entering and going through several formations in which they are birds, lifting their long arms in gentle waves, fluttering their fingers, moving their feet in a hula bourée, letting their bodies lower in lunges and pliés and then rise on tiptoes again.

The choreographer calls out makeshift names for the moves—“bird wave,” “*kai*,” “whisper.” (*Kai* is the Hawaiian word for water, and in hula it is usually expressed with a precise wave movement of the arms at the hips.)

“I just want you to moooooove,” he says, “but not too move-y.” He demonstrates with his own body. “Make your *kai*’s as smooth as possible, sweep and roll with your body: whisper into bird wave into *kai*.”

As I watch them work over and over on a very small segment, with lots of impromptu changes, Makuakāne choreographing on the bodies before him, proposing something, looking at it, changing it, I am reminded that a critic from the *Los Angeles Times* once compared the “ineffably smooth unison” of the Nā Lei Hulu dancers with “the best corps de ballet” and described a “lasting aftereffect something like having seen flowers that breathe and butterflies that think.”

Makuakāne has met with all three of his guest artists separately to conceptualize original pieces that celebrate the traditional status of mähū as cultural standard bearers, artisans, and healers. In Kaumakaiwa, in particular, he found an ambassador of mähū, someone who has thought deeply about the meaning of the word not just culturally but artistically. “In Hawai’i, we don’t have gendered pronouns,” she told a hula class in a Zoom lecture. “There is no such thing as ‘she’ or ‘he.’ It’s just ‘o ia.’” The term mähū literally translates to a state of being and doesn’t refer to a specific gender. It encompasses everything, the entire breadth of gender expression.”

With a collaborator like Kaumakaiwa (he calls her his “linchpin”), something new began to happen that took even Makuakāne by surprise. Call it collaboration, alchemy, or just the magic of finding a new muse. “I’m directing her, but I’m stimulated by her, and she by me,” he says.

“I’ve never hid the fact that I am gay, but in this show I can internalize that. I can ask myself, ‘What does it mean for me to do a show called *MĀHŪ*?’ I can step into a self that is always there, though perhaps hidden a bit, or protected. It allows me to inhabit that self fully.”

He clearly enjoys the flamboyance of these guest artists. “Every song is a parade, and who doesn’t love a parade?” he says. “The combination of guest artists is allowing me to go *all out*. Every choreographer wants that!”

“For this show, everything is being reexamined,” Makuakāne told Hawaii Public Radio. “People are going to see a combination of different musical styles, of costumes, of traditional, modern and contemporary dancing, chanting.”

I mean, I don’t like linear. I don’t like to start with tradition and then move through time to end up in contemporary times. I love to mix them all up. Because I feel that’s what my life is. I’m one big wheel collecting everything as I move throughout the day.”

Nā Lei Hulu presents *MĀHŪ*

Oct 22-23, 2022

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CONSTANCE HALE is a California journalist who has been writing about Hawaiian culture for three decades. Her award-winning features on hula, slack-key guitar, the sovereignty movement, the Hawaiian language, Big Island cowboys, and Spam musubi have appeared in the *Atlantic*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Afar*, *Smithsonian*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Miami Herald*, and *Honolulu*. She has written five books on language and literary style, including the best-selling *Sin and Syntax*. She has also written a book for children, *Iwalani’s Tree*. Hale, who was born in Hawai’i, started dancing the hula at seven and has studied with Kumu Hula Patrick Makuakāne for twenty-five years. Her biography of him, *The Natives Are Restless*, was published in 2016.



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by ANTWAN BANKS WILLIAMS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANTWAN BANKS WILLIAMS

EVERY S·E·C·O·N·D

I SURVIVED 13 YEARS IN PRISON, but I am not free from my experience of prison. I have nightmares of being thrown back into the system. I am hyper vigilant, often secluded, and wake up most days still amazed that I am not incarcerated. Every second of every day, I accept that my reality consists of the version of me that is free, and the version of me that will never be free.

I find myself torn between perspectives. One perspective tells me that I am living out my God-given right to freedom, will and agency. Simultaneously, I am thinking about how lucky I am to have been given a second chance at life.

Freedom has been packaged and purchased by most people in America as a divine right, something of the highest value. Currently and formerly incarcerated people know it to be a luxury, a privilege. What does that say about the mindset of those impacted by the carceral system?

One of my mentors, long-time teacher, and friend, Amie Dowling, presented me and three other people—Reyna Brown, Tiersa Nureyev and Maurice Reed—with an opportunity to collaborate on work that is meaningful

and true to who we are as artists. With no hesitation, I agreed. We had no clear vision or idea about what we wanted to create, but we each trusted the process. With time and space, art develops and challenges your thoughts, your understanding of self, and your lived experience. The one thing we were clear on is that this project was going to be centered around our close friend Maurice Reed who was released from San Quentin State Prison a few months earlier after also serving 13 years.

Maurice and I decided to find a place to start filming and talking through our experiences of being thrown back into a world that we had become strangers to.

And in that moment of uncertainty, we drove to Mare Island in Vallejo, California, where there is open parking,

land and trails. We noticed that where we parked fit the aesthetics of a prison. Tall buildings that look unattended, fences, locked gates, thick yellow lines that out-line unauthorized areas, police cars, security guards making rounds like clockwork, dirt, dust, and silence that could either be eerie or peaceful depending on places you have been.

In prison yards there are “Mac Shacks,” shacks where you can check out recreational gear: basketballs, handballs, footballs, soccer balls, jump ropes, horseshoes, and even chess boards. It’s also where correctional officers are sometimes posted. For people fortunate enough never to have experienced that, imagine a big brown toll booth only to fit one or two people.

Directly in front of where Maurice and I parked, there stood a “Mac Shack.” This is where the project must begin.

Maurice sat in front of the Mac Shack. There lay a long empty road between him and me, and it felt like he was awaiting someone’s arrival. Fingers interlaced, elbows on knees, sun settling behind him, and time continuing to pass. Sitting side by side with someone with whom I served almost eight years felt so natural and surreal. This long strip of empty road reminiscent of the

As formerly incarcerated people, we had to explore profound truths about prison that we still carry in our bodies: The gravity of being removed from society for over a decade. Our tattoos, injuries, memories, unprocessed traumas, survivor guilt.

concrete slabs we would walk day and night. We started reliving moments of our incarceration where we fantasized about being in the exact moment we were actually in—marveling at the journey, mourning the parts of ourselves still behind those walls, yellow lines, locked gates, and caged cells monitored by officers and security like clockwork.

Time, freedom, new life, a fresh start. These were some of the concepts we decided to explore. We presented our ideas to our other team members, Tiersa Nureyev and Reyna Brown, and knew their input would help guide the project and sculpt the vision.

We explored cities, places, spaces, styles of dance, types of movements, poetry, music, wardrobe, props, and self. As formerly incarcerated people, we had to explore profound truths about prison that we still carry in our bodies: The gravity of being removed from society for over a decade. Our tattoos, injuries, memories, unprocessed traumas, survivor guilt.

In the height of the COVID-19 pandemic Maurice recalls like clockwork voices near and far screaming and pleading for assistance when another incarcerated person fell ill, “MAN DOWN, MAN DOWN, MAN DOWN! Some people came back to the cells, and some didn’t. You would get word that someone else passed away.”

The goal of this piece is to both express and challenge. Express truth from our perspective and challenge those





who face what we create. How do we express the reality of confinement that is unique and honest? How do we highlight the cycles created by institutions to keep people in the same conditions they have always been in? How do we creatively say, “I am one of the millions of men and women who deserve a second chance or access to their God-given right to freedom?” How do we show how beautiful life is while remembering the decrepit structures we and others have been housed in?

By creating a duality in Maurice’s performance we show the various stages Maurice was in throughout his incarceration. Some movements are harder and faster; some moves are slower and more restrictive. His relationship to the space changes his movement.

We decided to have an hourglass representing the prison structure, the overpacked conditions, time, and the people who are trapped and may never get out. We understand that prison possesses a power that can turn people’s worlds upside down at a moment’s notice. And those that live within those structures are forced to adjust and adapt while still fighting to pass through the door to freedom. We are privileged in the eyes of those still serving their sentences, while understanding that freedom is not just a concept or an idea. It is an act of agency that extends beyond cells, locked gates, yellow lines, and prison walls. It extends beyond ankle monitors and a fifty-mile radius that keeps people monitored. Freedom extends beyond our future and reaches into our past. Addressing all of our truths and challenging us in a way that makes you face a version of you that you didn’t even know existed.

Freedom offers you the opportunity to restructure your mind. That is a challenge that Maurice and I have been addressing in this project and in our own lives.

When I was incarcerated, I wanted the freedom to create in prison, be it dance, music, paintings, or drawings. Then I wanted my freedom. Once I was paroled, I thought I was free. Until freedom showed up as a desire to be off parole. Once I got off parole and became a completely free man, I realized I wasn’t free from the nightmares of my experiences in prison or the anxiety I felt when I was around someone in law enforcement.

Amie Dowling, Reyna Brown, Tiersa Nureyev, Maurice Reed, and I have been unpacking this idea of freedom that we have all bought into—making room for a new look at freedom.

While doing this project, one thing has become clear: the carceral system can only confine those it encounters. It can never give someone freedom. We have to give that to ourselves every second of every day from this point on.

ANTWAN “BANKS” WILLIAMS is the Co-Creator and Sound Designer of the award-winning podcast [Ear Hustle](#). He is a dancer and choreographer who studied movement, rhythm, and sound for four years while serving a 15-year sentence in San Quentin State Prison. He specializes in modern, contemporary, krump, and hip-hop dance styles while infusing story-telling in performing arts. He is also well versed in videography, video editing, music production, and audio engineering. In 2019 Antwan was released from prison after serving 13 years in the CA Department of Rehabilitation. He continues to work for the podcast, produce video content, volunteer inside and outside prisons, and tour schools as a public speaker, using his lived experience to educate and enhance people’s understanding of the justice system and cultural conditioning.

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DANCE CLASSES
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STUDIO RENTAL

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In 2021 I was hired as an artist in residence at Ruth Asawa School of the Arts (SOTA), a San Francisco high school I graduated from in 2020. I was hired to choreograph a piece for their dance department, my first piece as a commissioned choreographer. I named the piece *Passing*. In many ways the title was a literal translation of what occurred on stage. The 35 dancers passed an imaginary ball in a series of cannons. As the piece progresses the ball turns into an energy, echoing social patterns, the passage of time and the sense of fellowship and interdependence within our communities. But with time I have seen that this piece is about more than that. It is a reflection of myself, my education, and my relationship with dance.

My parents enrolled me in rhythmic gymnastics once I was old enough to remember movement. I rehearsed routines packed full of tricks for months only to perform them in some dingy gym in front of judges, for a score on a projector. I loved performing more than anything and I always scored the most points in the “performance” category. But when it came to the tricks I always fell short, leaving me further and further down on the podium as the years went by. It felt like an uphill battle, training for competitions I would never win. Finally, at ten years old, I auditioned for the San Francisco Ballet School. It was a class solely composed of my favorite part of rhythmic gymnastics: the performance. I promptly quit my rhythmic gymnastics dreams and began training at the school.

My first years at the San Francisco Ballet School were bliss, there was no other place I would have rather spent my time other than the studio. I got to dance in the same studios, and on the same stage as my idols: Maria Kochetkova, Sofiane Sylve, and Davit Karapetyan. I was in a ballet daze, it became everything to me. All my friends were from the studio, all we spoke about was ballet. In the evenings after class I would run across the street to watch the ballet, and dream of life on the stage from the standing room of the opera house. My ballet teachers became gods, I would do anything for their approval, every word they uttered was gospel. Thousands of tendus with my hand on that wooden barre for the high of walking the hallways under the stage, the smell of the cakey stage makeup, the trill of the orchestra rehearsing, the curtain, the audience, the music, the lights, the stage. There was nothing else in the world for me other than ballet.

As the years passed the classes got more and more technical. We learned how to partner, practiced fouettes and learned variations from ballets.

I watched my friends get kicked out and new, better, thinner girls take their spot. I squeezed my bleeding, blistered feet into pointe shoes. I did my plies, I worshiped technique. Eventually the teachers’ critique started to shift to things I couldn’t control. No matter how much I sucked in in the mirror and no matter how many dinners I skipped, I continued to disappoint them. But there was nothing else in the world; I had to do ballet. It was my whole life and my whole future. My relationship with my body became a battle that everyone around me was fighting. If only I looked like the other girls, then I could move to the next level. Maybe skip the hummus and just eat the carrots. Every mirror tells me something different. I cry holding onto the wooden barre. I don’t know what I look like. In the end my spot at the school was replaced by someone who could fit into their vision of a dancer.

I would have never thought that two years later I would be the choreographer at the front of a room of 35 dancers.

I had 16 rehearsals to achieve my vision.

The first rehearsals were challenging, there were so many dancers. Thirty-five bodies can be so intimidating, like a huge blank canvas, or a blank paper. What do I do with all these people? How do I make something that’s my own? I remembered how frustrating it had been to sit in rehearsals with 40 other dancers trying to get put in the front. I had empathy for my dancers, and wanted them all to be seen.

Of course, this proved to be frustrating and challenging. Many times I left rehearsals feeling defeated, but I was stubborn. I told myself I had a goal to achieve—as long as I stuck to it, it would work.

PHOTOS BY DASHA YURKEVICH



I learned to dance on different levels. With the floor, my fellow dancers and myself.

As the rehearsals went on I could see it begin to come together. The dancers began embodying the theme. When they synchronized with my imagination I jumped and shouted. It was so beautiful to see so many interpretations of my movement. It was so beautiful to see so many people moving together.

Contemporary classes had always been inferior to ballet. It was so easy compared to the rigor of ballet. My eyes couldn't see past the absence of a placed fifth position. However, during my last summer at the San Francisco Ballet School I took choreographer and dance educator Dexandro Montalvo's contemporary class. It challenged me like no dance class ever had. My brain strained to grasp the fast-paced combination and instantly flooded me with a dance high when I finally got it. Towards the end of one of our classes, he told us to do the combination but in a different way. He said that we could do it fluidly and connected, or to hit and finish the movements. It blew my mind. I had never experienced so much artistic freedom within such tightly choreographed movements. After that class he invited me to join the ODC teen program, a pre-professional dance program that focused on contemporary dance.

I spent the next year taking Dexandro's class twice a week. There were only 5 other girls that were part of the ODC Dance Lab that year. With such

a small class the teachers worked closely with each of us. Still, despite my teachers' honest efforts, it was hard to shake my early experience with ballet. Every ballet class felt like a kick in the face; my leotards suffocated me, the music jeered at me, a constant reminder of my failure. But, I attended the ballet classes, so afterwards I could put on socks and shorts and go to rehearsals with ODC co-directors Brenda Way and Kimi Okada, and learn the ODC company repertoire straight from the directors. I learned to dance on different levels. With the floor, my fellow dancers and myself.

When I was a freshman at SOTA we had a weekly choreography class. Our first assignment was to create a solo. This was the first time I had ever choreographed, and it quickly became my favorite class. From that point on I choreographed whenever I had the opportunity. Over the years I made lots of short phrases in classes, learned about choreographic tools and began to develop an eye for watching dance. When I got to ODC I began to develop my own opinion on dance. What movement made me feel something, what made me sleepy, what did I dislike, what shocked me? I also listened to the

people around me, who noticed what. Were they as confused as me? What evoked a reaction? I began to reflect on my opinions in my choreography. I wanted the audience to understand the movement and relate to it. I wanted to use movements that make the audience want to move. I wanted it to be clear, emotional, and unignorable. I wanted my art to be able to be seen by anyone.

Every time I watched *Passing*, when it was on stage, it left me shaking. Seeing the audience walk into the theater, chattering in their red chairs. The hush as the lights dim, the bright yellow light unveiling the dancers. The quiet exclamations from the people beside me. The adrenaline of knowing the choreography. This is the crescendo, the accumulation of all my work. I thought that *Passing* was about community, time, and social patterns but I realize that it is also a reflection of how I see dance now. The stage goes dark and there's an eruption of applause from the audience.

DASHA YURKEVICH is a young dancer, choreographer, educator and artist. She was born and raised in San Francisco by her parents who immigrated from Uzbekistan. She trained at the San Francisco Ballet School, Ruth Asawa School of the Arts and ODC. She is also an advocate for youth empowerment and leadership in the outdoors. She started [Youth Bike America](#) to provide outdoor experiences through bike touring. She has helped lead two major bike tours across the United States.

PHOTOS BY DASHA YURKEVICH

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BY MELISSA HUDSON BELL

WATCH OUT FOR THE BIG GRRRLS

Most of my life I told myself I was too fat to have short hair. It was said matter of factly, without angst or shame, and only ever to myself (I would never admit to such warped anti-feminist thinking out loud). In my delusional thinking the longer hair was somehow balancing out the proportions of my body—drawing the emphasis away from my back rolls and big thighs. I think perhaps I felt it was helping to project some sort of feminine allure that I had absorbed was attractive and advantageous for navigating the world. Having short hair, I must have imagined, would limit my appeal (read, to men), expose all my physical “flaws,” and just be too much for the public to bear. What a load of baloney.

I was (and remain) a white, mid-upper class woman with a supportive community and a ton of privilege. I moved confidently through the world, wasn’t afraid to use my voice, and had a history of often getting what I wanted. So, on some level, I was proud of being big, of taking up space... but only to an extent. The self-confidence that I projected was, in part, a defense mechanism designed to keep folks from even a whiff of the soft vulnerable underbelly of insecurity I had about my size.

THEY TALK THE REAL SHIT ABOUT LIVING IN A WORLD that has historically held women of color down, denigrating their bodies and denying their beauty. But in addition to that—in addition to that—the show showcases them exuding radical joy, reveling in self-discovery, experiencing transformational self-love and benefiting from a growing sisterhood of women who see aspects of themselves in each other. And, Lizzo is right there for all of it.

Now that I'm squarely in middle age, I am coming to recognize my inner talk about my body meant that I was perpetually limiting myself, particularly when it came to dance.

Growing up my body was bigger than my dancer friends' bodies. I was bigger, in fact, than just about every dancer I knew or saw perform. It is perhaps not surprising then, that in addition to weaving nonsensical tales about the length of my hair, I concocted an internal narrative wherein my big, round body was the thing that would forever keep me from being cast by the major dance companies I admired (and there is, regrettably, likely some truth to that). So sure was I that my size precluded me from having a shot at the career that I so (secretly) desired, that I never really wholeheartedly pursued life as a dancer.

Of course I can now recognize that the call to diminish myself was coming from inside the proverbial house. My thoughts about my size had been steadily absorbed through exposure to American culture that, in the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 21st century, applauded and exalted small women and jeered and pitied larger ones. The icons I was drawn to as an 80s kid were Mary Lou Retton, Paula Abdul, Janet Jackson - all tiny. In my teenage years and beyond it was women who projected the strength I sought - Serena Williams, Idina Menzel, Kate Winslet (who, you may recall,

received intense scrutiny for her body size after the debut of *Titanic*).

Now, I get that this is not news—women in American society absorb self-loathing like face cream because we live under an insidious regime of white supremacist, misogynistic, patriarchal bullshit. We know this. But, it is because of this that when new idols emerge who have managed to break through the constraints that held me and so many like me back, I think we need to celebrate and acknowledge them.

The icon I never had, but wish I had, is Lizzo. Lizzo's meteoric rise to fame in the past few years has been a gift to women of all sizes, as Lizzo shouts to the rooftops her pride in being a "big girl," and uses her fame and influence to lift people up**. Her bold embrace of her curves has grown in tandem with her success, and is a major part of her brand. Her music videos and stage shows highlight the glorious expansiveness of her body as she shakes and shimmies, twerks and grooves her way through her hit songs. And, lucky us, she is not alone up there. She has been steadily recruiting fellow dancers to join her - a crew she affectionately and exuberantly calls her "Big Grrrls," whose big bodies and bigger talents have now been featured in a stunning array of performances.

According to Lizzo, finding Big Grrrls has been difficult, in no small part because agents who represent commercial dancers historically

haven't taken on big girls as clients. This prompted Lizzo to take to social media and put out a call for self-proclaimed big girl dancers to come and join her. She got results. Thousands of results, in fact. And then, brilliantly, she built a television show called "Watch Out for the Big Grrrls" around thirteen possible candidates.

This show is the medicine I didn't know I needed.

What a revelation it was to see these full-figured ladies dance together, learn together, and grow into themselves in each and every episode. They are resplendent and fully present. They work hard, sweating it out in challenge after rigorous challenge. As may be expected, they share stories about the hate and abuse they have received as dancers and humans living in big bodies, about their own self-doubts and the ways they have been overlooked. As women of color, they also share stories about colorism, about insecurities over wearing their natural hair, about police violence, and about transphobia, that the public needs to hear. They talk the real shit about living in a world that has historically held women of color down, denigrating their bodies and denying their beauty. But in addition to that—in addition to that—the show showcases them exuding radical joy, reveling in self-discovery, experiencing transformational self-love and benefiting from a growing

sisterhood of women who see aspects of themselves in each other. And, Lizzo is right there for all of it.

It's bad bitch o'clock, yeah it's thick thirty.

I've been through a lot, but I'm still flirty.

Is everybody back up in the buildin'?

It's been a minute, tell me how you're healin'

Cause I'm about to get into my feelings.

How you feelin'? How you feel right now?

—Lizzo, "About Damn Time"

From the start it is apparent that Lizzo and director Nneka Onuorah were not interested in following the typical reality show formula that pits contestants against one another as they scramble to emerge as a single victorious "best" or "favorite" dancer a la *So You Think You Can Dance*, *America's Best Dance Crew*, *Dancing with the Stars*, etc. Instead, everyone who proves themselves to be ready for the challenge of being catapulted into a career as a professional dancer is welcome to come along for the ride.

The girls dance. A lot. They live in a mansion with a pool and a gym and a rehearsal studio. The camera follows them through their daily routine, where they work on weekly dance challenges. They have dance battles, make their own music videos, develop a stage persona and learn existing choreography from Lizzo's stage shows, generally while donning a stunning array of bright-colored, form-fitting outfits. But, the challenges don't stop there. They are offered sensual movement class to get in touch with their sexiness, a healing workshop to help them break through their own mental barriers, and a solo nude photo shoot to help them learn to love and appreciate their bodies.

Over and over again, emphasis is put on cultivating the emotional prowess that makes a dancer great. Their bigness is celebrated but not spectacularized. Their hardships are explored but not sensationalized. Witnessing their personal transformations as they step more boldly into their light as performers is a real gift.

And the show's gifts don't stop at the level of personal transformation (whether in the viewer or the contestant). Lizzo brings forth her entire empire of entertainment industry professionals to come and work with the girls. This is key—and it is a thing of radical beauty. She shows us what's possible for the industry if there were massively less fatphobia and racism. The show recognizes that it takes a village to build a superstar, and Lizzo's crew is a team of powerful women of color (with one or two white girl exceptions) who are at the top of their game and are reveling in these girls' shine. There are OG Big Grrrls like Shirlene Quigley who has been dancing with Lizzo for years, and Chawntá Marie Van (who despite being a relatively recent addition to the Big Grrrls is given an opportunity to choreograph a piece for the show). The contestants work closely with Tanisha Scott, Lizzo's acclaimed creative director, and choreographer Charm La'Donna. Director Nneka Onuorah makes on-camera appearances as a mentor when the girls create music videos. The sensual workshop leader Rashida KhanBey Miller and the healing and self-love workshop DeJaJoelle are both Black female entrepreneurs. SZA shows up to give feedback and affirmations, as does Missy Elliott, via video. Each of these individuals emphasizes that what makes a dancer great is not just how well she delivers on dance steps or stage direction, but also how she feels about herself while doing it. And then, because of how the show

is structured to help the girls flourish instead of flounder, we as viewers get to watch them embody these realizations in their dance—and it is wonderful. Their movement gets richer, freer, more grounded and bold. They bloom. And, in turn, we, as viewers maybe get to bloom a little too.

In my research for this piece I took a deep dive into all things Lizzo. I found a video from a 2019 stage show in Glasgow. In it, Lizzo states the following wisdom, which I will leave you with here:

"Your transgressions can become your greatest blessings, bitch... I want you to know that if you can love me, you can love your goddamn self. And if you don't mind, I want to do a little mantra with you. I want you to go home tonight and look in the mirror and say, 'I love you, you are beautiful and you can do anything.' I really want you to say that because I believe we can save the world if we can save ourselves first. It starts with you. I'm one bitch. But you all are thousands and thousands of bitches. And you all can change the world..."

Thanks, Lizzo. I'm working on it.

**I use the phrase 'big girl' throughout this piece because it's the phrase Lizzo uses to describe her dancers, not because I think 'fat' is a bad word. Fat is, as [Aubrey Gordon](#) writes, 'a neutral descriptor that can hold different kinds of power for different people.'"*

MELISSA HUDSON BELL (she/her) is a dancer, choreographer, teacher, writer, and VP of WKB Industries. She lives in Oakland with her husband and three young kids. She likes to ride horses. She dislikes the sound of styrofoam. She has recently taught at UC Berkeley, Santa Clara University, and USF. She has recently danced mostly in her living room, but she is thinking about getting back out there. Melissa is interested in dance as an art form, field of critical inquiry and agent for social change. Dance events that are experimental, accessible, and collaborative. Choreography that is born of and that stimulates curiosity. Movement as a means of shaping and reshaping our world.



Afro-Peruvian Resilience and Empowerment Through the Dance Son de los Diablos

by CARMEN ROMÁN | PHOTO BY JEAN MELESAINÉ

“Ritmos Negros del Perú (Black Rhythms of Peru)”

By NICOMEDES SANTA CRUZ

Dedicated to don Porfirio Vásquez A.

Translation adapted from “Black Rhythms of Peru”

by Heidi Feldman

*Ritmos de la esclavitud
Contra amarguras y penas.
Al compás de las cadenas
Ritmos negros del Perú.*

De África llegó mi abuela
vestida con caracoles,
la trajeron lo’ españoles
en un barco carabela.
La marcaron con candela
la carimba fue su cruz.
Y en América del Sur
al golpe de sus dolores
dieron los negros tambores
ritmos de la esclavitud.

Por una moneda sola
la revendieron en Lima
y en la Hacienda ‘La Molina’
sirvió a la gente española.
Con otros negros de Angola
ganaron por sus faenas
zancudos para sus venas
para dormir duro suelo
y naíta’e consuelo
contra amarguras y penas...

En la plantación de caña
nació el triste socabón,
en el trapiche de ron
el negro cantó la zaña.
El machete y la guadaña
curtió sus manos morenas;
y los indios con sus quenás
y el negro con tamborete
cantaron su triste suerte
al compás de las cadenas.

Murieron los negros viejos
pero entre la caña seca
se escucha su zamacueca
y el panalivio muy lejos.
Y se escuchan los festejos
que cantó en su juventud.
De Cañete a Tombuctú,
De Chancay a Mozambique
llevan sus claros repiques
ritmos negros del Perú.

*Rhythms of slavery
Against bitterness and sorrow.
To the beat of the chains
Black rhythms of Peru.*

My grandmother came from Africa
adorned in shells,
Spaniards brought her
in a caravel ship.
They marked her with fire
the branding iron was her cross.
And in South America
to the beat of her pain
Black drums sounded
rhythms of slavery.

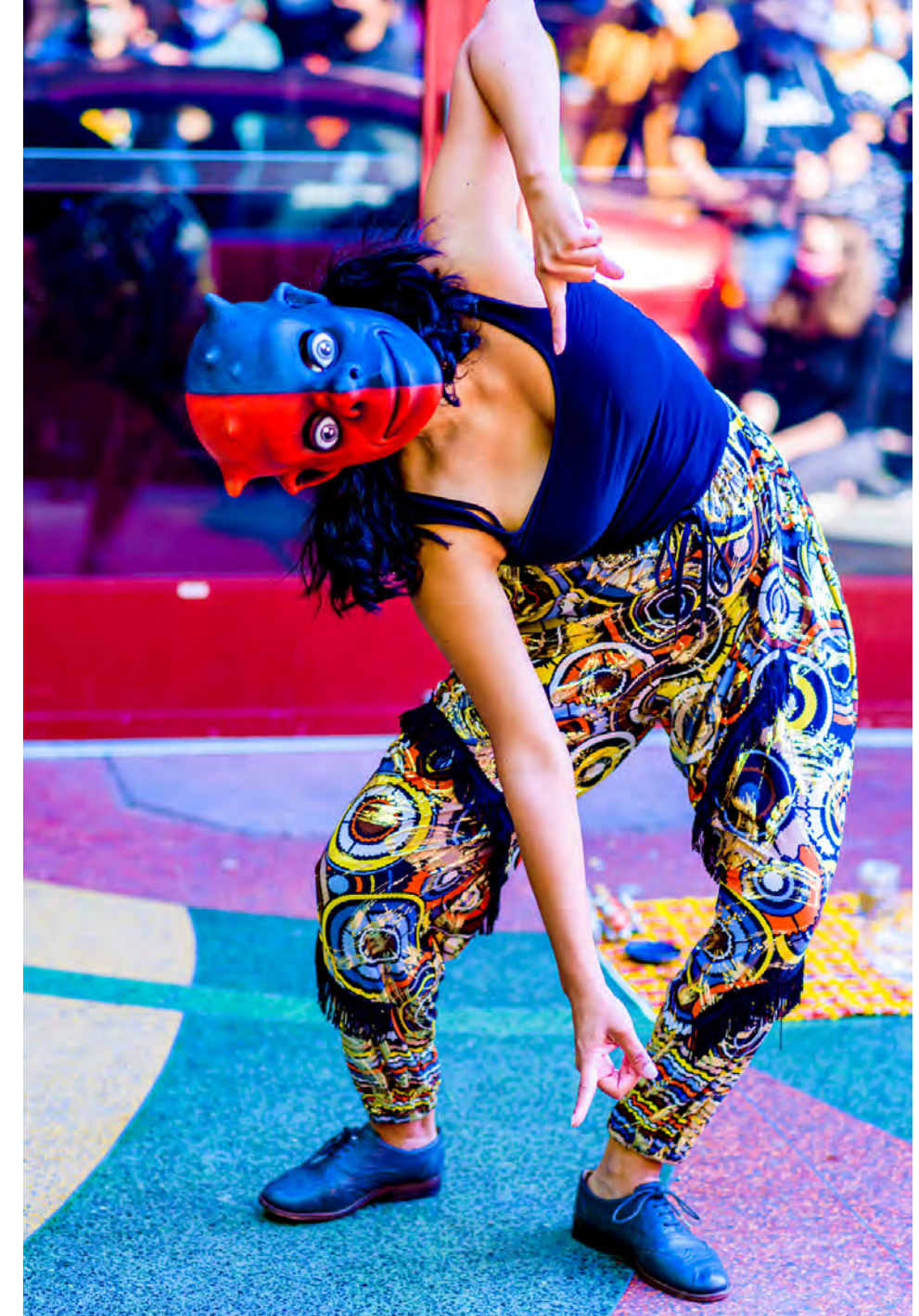
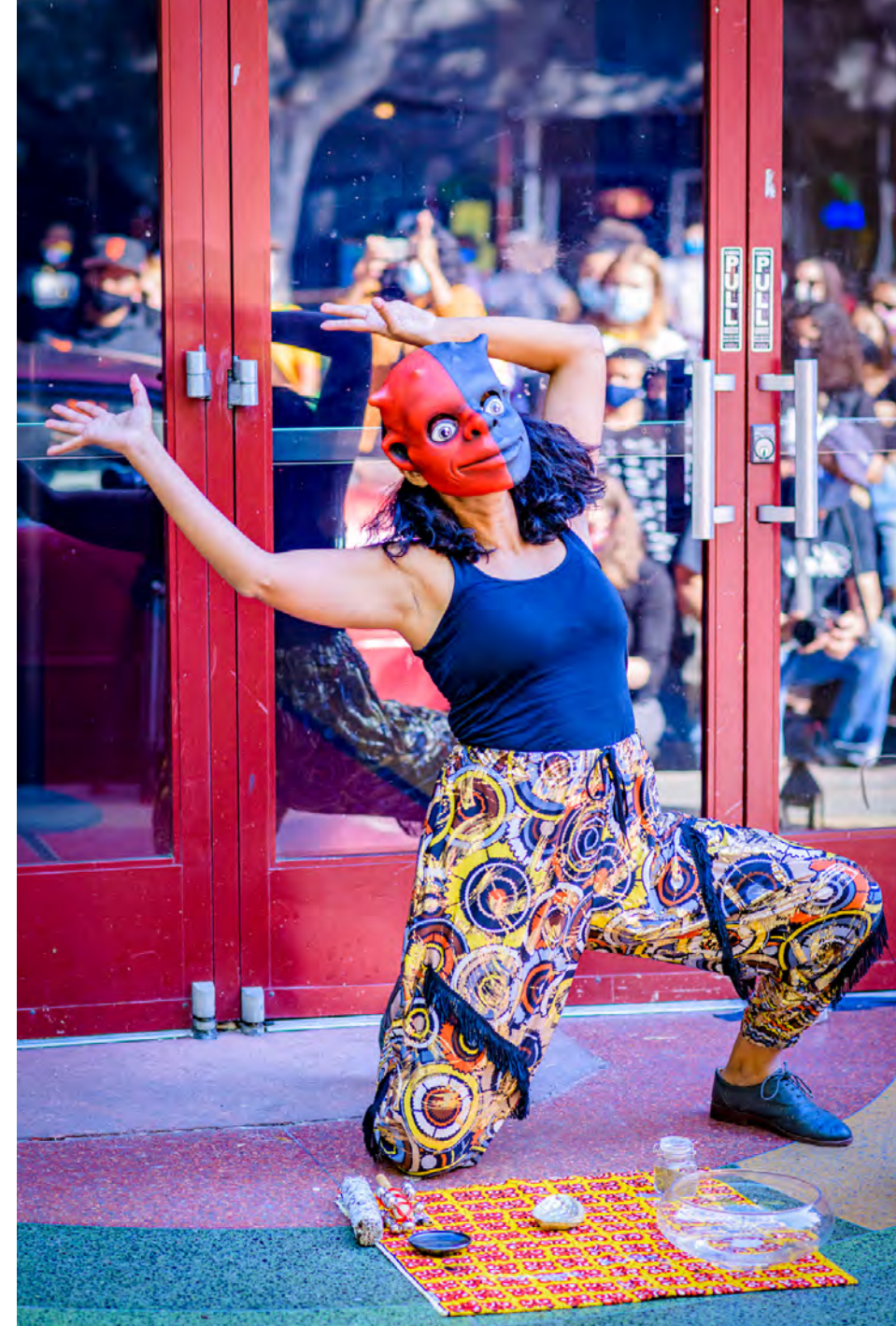
For a single coin
she was resold in Lima
and in the Hacienda ‘La Molina’
she served Spanish people.
With other Blacks from Angola
they earned for their labor
mosquitos for their veins
to sleep, a hard ground
and no consolation
against bitterness and sorrow...

On the sugar plantation
was born the sorrowful *socabón*,
at the rum press
the Black man sang the *zaña*.
The machete and the scythe
toughened his brown hands;
and the Indians with their *quenás*
and the Black man with the drum
they sang their sad fate
to the beat of the chains.

The old Blacks died
but among the dried sugar cane
one hears the sound of their *zamacueca*
and the *panalivio* far in the distance.
And one hears the *festejos*
that they sang in their youth.
From Cañete to Timbuktu,
From Chancay to Mozambique
their clear drum rolls carry
Black rhythms of Peru.

Names of Afro-Peruvian artists and culture bearers who have passed. “Ritmos Negros del Perú” and these names are recited during *Huellas*.

Porfirio Vásquez
 Agosto y Elías Ascues
 Nicomedes Santa Cruz
 Victoria Santa Cruz
 Abelardo, Vicente, Osvaldo y Jose Santos Vasquez
 Ronaldo Campos
 Caitro Soto
 Mercedes Traslaviña
 Vicky Izquierdo
 Lucila Campos
 Carlos Hayre
 Felix Casaverde
 Chocolate Argendones
 Amador Ballumbrosio
 Adelina Guadalupe
 Eusebio Sirio Pititi
 Manuela Lavalle
 Chalena Vasquez
 Pepe Vasquez
 Manuel Vasquez “Mangüe”
 Rafael Santa Cruz
 Aldo Borjas
 El Tati Agüero
 Lalo Izquierdo



The work of [Cunamacué](#) is one of reimagining, remembering and reconstructing Afro-Peruvian dance practices. By combining Afro-Peruvian dance movements with ancestral memory and historical information, Cunamacué brings visibility to the presence and cultural contributions of African descendants in Peru. I founded Cunamacué in 2010 in Oakland, California.

Cunamacué’s latest work, *Huellas* (Footprints), is inspired by the ancestral dance Son de los Diablos.

Son de los Diablos is a street masquerade dance that originated during colonial times in the Catholic procession of Corpus Christi. Originally, Son de los Diablos was only a *comparsa*—a group of musicians that take part in carnivals and other festivities. Peruvians of African descent took this dance and made it their own by adding dance movements, and interacting with the audience in a playful manner; dancers wore devil masks to represent the disorder and sin the Catholic church was supposed to redeem.

For Cunamacué, Son de los Diablos is synonymous with resilience. African descendants were able to turn around the duress of the slave system and give life to this dance form.

SON DE LOS DIABLOS is the first-documented dance of African descendants in Peru. The dance may have given way

to Afro-Peruvian instruments such as the *cajita* (small wooden box) and *quijada de burro* (donkey’s jawbone). Both instruments appear alongside dancers wearing devil masks in watercolors by an Afro-Peruvian artist named Pancho Fierro who painted everyday life in Lima during colonial times.

African descendants may have also hidden their deities behind the masks. Although there is no written documentation of this, ethnomusicologist Chalena Vasquez makes mention of it as a possibility in the documentary [La voz de los sin voz](#).

For us, wearing masks represents a connection to the ancestral world. It helps create a space to remember how we worshiped and encountered energies or deities that existed in our cosmology before we were colonized.

“There is power as well as ancestral lineage that gets passed on when a mask is worn,” my colleague and fellow Cunamacué member Nia Womack-Freeman reminds us. “So, for me, to have the opportunity to be open to receiving that is a great blessing. I feel dancing in this way creates a connection with ancestors where they can pass their wisdom and traditions to the next generation.”

The Son de los Diablos is documented as far back as the 1800s in Fierro’s watercolors. But from the late

1950s until 1988 the Son de los Diablos dance disappeared from both popular practice and stage. In February 1988 Movimiento Negro Francisco Congo and Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani brought back the dance. A group of around 30 dancers and musicians paraded through the streets of Lima.

As a stage production, Son de los Diablos’ movements, costumes, and masks were standardized. It became a tradition for the Son de los Diablos masks to be all red. In Pancho Fierro’s watercolors we can see masks that are two colors. Perhaps the colors represented deities, perhaps they represented nations, or neighborhoods, we don’t know. In Cunamacué’s elaboration of Son de los Diablos, we also wear masks that are two colors. One side is red, the other color varies. Wearing these two-colored masks reminds us that even though the masks are separate from us, when we put them on, they allow us to embody our ancestral spirit, energy, or deity.

African religions did not survive in Peru. Because of that, in my dance creations, I often imagine a dance practice that goes hand in hand with a spiritual practice, one that was not imposed upon us.

Huellas is a collective creation between myself; Afro-Peruvian dancer, musician, and actor Pierr Padilla

Vasquez; and violinist Kyla Danysh. The title of the performance, *Huellas* literally translates to “footprints,” as in ancestral footprints on which we walk along. Both the origins of Son de los Diablos and the wearing of the devil masks originated from a colonial Catholic perspective. Colonizers tried to impose a persona upon African descendants, but instead African descendants in Peru adopted the dance and created a cultural practice of it. *Huellas* is a music, dance, and theater piece that renders tribute to our individual and collective ancestors who have laid the ground for us and whose work we build upon.

Huellas will premiere November 19 and 20 at St. James Episcopal Church in Oakland. Presenting *Huellas* inside a church is a revindication of that arduous path our ancestors walked upon, of the imposition of the masks, and of religion itself.

CARMEN ROMÁN is a dancer, choreographer, educator, filmmaker, and the founding artistic director of Cunamacué. Her article, “The Danced Spirituality of African Descendants in Peru,” was published in the *African Performance Review* (2013). Carmen was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship (2015) to research Afro-Peruvian dance. Her documentary *Herencia de Un Pueblo*, shot in El Carmen, Peru, received Best Documentary and Best Cinematography awards at the San Francisco Dance Film Festival (2016). In 2019 she was awarded the Mythili Kumar Emerging Artist Award and was commissioned by the SF Ethnic Dance Festival. Carmen teaches dance in Bay Area public schools.

PHOTOS BY KYLE ADLER



LEANING INTO THE UNEXPECTED:

The vulnerability and willingness of anthropology and performance

BY HALEY BAEK

WHEN I TELL PEOPLE I study performance as an anthropology major at college, many consider the two an odd mix. However, I've always found the two fields to be very similar to one another. For one thing, both of them have some sort of live interaction at their core. Anthropology, roughly defined as a study of human societies and cultures, takes "fieldwork" as the primary method of data collection. Anthropologists immerse themselves in a certain field, interacting with what is happening and conducting interviews. This means that research is often all about building connections with people and places. Similarly, performers and artists are not only in conversation with their audience as they perform, but they are also inspired by all sorts of people and things that surround them in the process of creating. Both

PHOTO BY JOE SORRANKO

fields also constantly ask questions speculating on human life. The theatrical concern of how we can stay connected through art ties gracefully into the anthropological interest of what it means for us to "live together" in this world. I fall in love with the lush humanness of it all every time.

What has largely contributed to my adoration for anthropology and performance recently though, are the moments of unscripted surprise that often happen within meticulous "choreography." For me, those unexpected encounters almost feel like the most important part of research or a production.

Before I begin any ethnographic research, I spend a lot of time building a detailed plan. I read piles of articles and books related to my theme of research and think about specific events I want to check out, or people that I might want to talk to. I also scrutinize every detail on the internet about my interviewees and write out lists of questions in the order I want to ask them in. While this step of the research is indeed critical to lay the foreground of the forthcoming process, when I actually sit down with my interviewee, much of what I had prepared recedes to the background as the real-time interaction unfolds. Even if I start off with a simple, "Please tell me your name and age" question, sometimes they jump into a twenty minute long story about their failed relationship. But, such surprises take different forms, too. One time, an interviewee generously shared a traumatic experience similar to one I had, allowing both of us to talk it through together and seek ways to keep our lives going. Another time, I was at a memorial gathering and coincidentally encountered a psychologist who I've been following on Twitter for years. We had a long, inspiring

ILLUSTRATION BY HALEY BAEK

STUDYING THEATER AND PERFORMANCE FEELS LIKE HAVING THE SAME EPIPHANY BUT JUST IN A PARALLEL UNIVERSE.

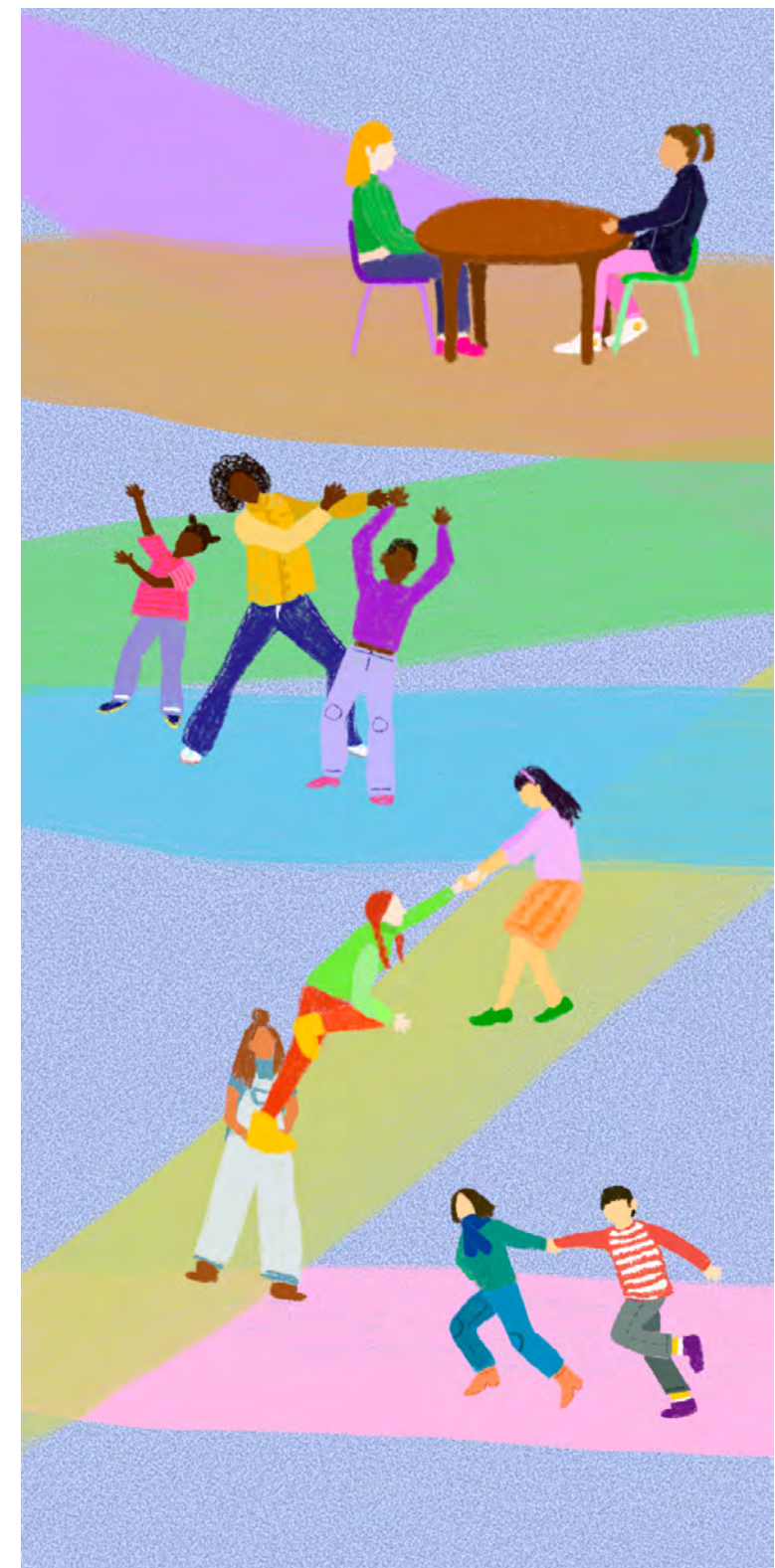
conversation about queer death, loss and mourning, which not only helped me narrow down my research, but also healed me.

For me, the most constructive learnings, whether or not they are related to my research, come much more from unpredictable events rather than the intense preparation. I've had my predictions based on books shattered multiple times as I started the actual fieldwork. I've also had days where I learned nothing that would help me write my paper, but still collected precious pieces of wisdom that were and are up to this day, helpful to me as a person. Even though I step into the field as a researcher, these occasions let me recognize myself as a fellow human. I'm not trying to find evidence for my claim and build up my own intellect, but I am engaging in a real, moving, live world. I genuinely want to see, to listen, and to connect.

Studying theater and performance feels like having the same epiphany but just in a parallel universe. I know how much preparation goes into building a show. Thorough devising and intense rehearsal is usually what is behind breathtaking productions. But as much as I respect and enjoy the rigor of that groundwork, I love how live performances, with so many variables, tend to shift shapes when they leave the rehearsal room. For instance, I had to design a rigged bingo game for a show to make everybody win at the same time. Playing the game in rehearsals with a few others to make sure the system worked, I felt like it lacked energy and I got bored. Then, on opening night, when I saw the entire theater shooting their hands up in the air and exploding into joy, I suddenly found the bingo game to be bursting with life.

Another time I was playing the role of a postal carrier. During a performance I realized mid-path that no one was sitting in the area I was supposed to deliver the letter to. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't in a bit of a frenzy. But when I finally arrived to meet eyes with an actual person, not an imaginary audience member in an empty chair, it felt like the moment was swept into a deeper realm than I could reach when I was rehearsing. These moments feel precarious and vulnerable, but they become beautiful because of that.

When talking about precarity and





vulnerability, I should mention that I started college at the beginning of the pandemic, and have been juggling even more changes. To have rehearsals and performances canceled last minute and to see companies making the difficult decision to shut down was so disheartening. Yet, at the same time, I still enjoy the new adventures this unprecedented crisis brings into my life. Most recently, I flew to Ashland, Oregon from Seoul, South Korea to make a show. I worked on it for a month and then had to accept the fact that the five-day sold out show was being canceled for safety reasons. However, the private showing that was presented to just a handful of special guests felt so intimate and precious that I couldn't wish for anything better. Similarly, the actors that I interviewed two years ago for my research on pandemic theater told me that while they were grieving

the closure of theaters, they were also finding joy in exploring online meeting platforms as possible stages for their new play.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes, "To study anthropology is to study with people, not to make studies of them." The simple sentence implies different things; anthropologists need to build relationships and not extract; they need to pay attention and actually listen to what people say; they should take responsibility for the stories that are shared. But at the crux of the argument is the idea that people are not static objects of investigation, but rather, are unique, complex, and shifting individuals. The kinds of theater work that I'm drawn to are mostly the ones that actively create "with" people, welcoming unexpected encounters. Productions that invite community members into the creative team, or shows that allow children to

make as much noise as they want, or even just directors and choreographers who fully trust the performers and their impulses. I still believe preparation allows improvisation to flourish. If we are not ready to be responsible and attentive, the exchange "with" others can easily become exploitative. But the willingness and vulnerability of the efforts within this commitment is what I will always celebrate. And performance makers who are eager to constantly be impacted by others and thus choose to stay open and curious feel the closest to my hometown of anthropology.

HALEY BAEK is a junior at Yonsei University, South Korea, studying cultural anthropology and performance. Particularly interested in themes such as care, mental health, trauma, loss and queer theory, Haley explores how art and anthropological research can inform and inspire each other.

ILLUSTRATION BY HALEY BAEK



MEGAN LOWE DANCES
FLYING ANGELS CHINESE DANCE COMPANY
AMANI PHOTOGRAPHYY

A Sense of Belonging Among Ever-Changing Circumstances

I **BEGAN TEACHING DANCE** for PD® in Oakland, in 2007. The classes are free and open to anyone who has Parkinson's disease. Classes are taught with a live accompanist and structured like a typical dance class which offers a warm-up, center, across the floor, and ends with a dance combination. No prior dance experience is required. Unlike activities designed for therapeutic outcomes that bring patients into clinical settings, Dance for PD®, a program from the Mark Morris Dance Group, brings dancers with Parkinson's into the dance studio. There, they have an opportunity to explore dynamic qualities, reference spacial landmarks, and develop ensemble experiences through imagery and musicality. It is a dance program crafted specifically for this special population.

Parkinson's disease is a degenerative disease which is idiopathic and has no known cure. It affects the motor system which can manifest in stiffness, festination, bradykinesia, and/or tremor. It might seem strange that dance classes are offered to those who suffer from a movement disorder. Dance for PD® is now offered in 25 countries around the world and each Dance for PD® program uniquely addresses the interests and specialties of the teacher and the region. In my own classes, I see how the tools and techniques that dancers use can be extremely helpful for those living with Parkinson's disease. In particular, imagery and musicality are very effective. When I first started teaching, I would say, "Let's turn to the right," but quickly found that it could be challenging for some to

BY CLAUDINE NAGANUMA, DIRECTOR OF dNAGA

PHOTO BY MATT HABER



move their legs and shift their weight. Changing my tactic, I said, "Look at the butterfly and watch it flutter across the moon," this imagery somehow unlocks the dancer within, and I see them turn with ease and grace.

In 2009, I started the PEACE Project in order to provide opportunities for dancers with Parkinson's to perform with my intergenerational company dNaga. It was a way for those

dancers who had been taking class to use their acquired dance skills and experience the thrill of being part of a production. I was also interested in learning more about the experience of having Parkinson's disease and how one could find peace despite grappling with this continuously changing condition. This inquiry led me on a narrative medicine journey that manifested in the creation of several dances as

well as a book, *PEACE About Life: Dancing with Parkinson's*.

As part of my artistic process, I collect interviews around a specific subject. One such subject has been centered on diagnosis. Many people, after being diagnosed, look back on their experience and realize that there were telltale signs of motor impairment that they may have noticed early on. Usually this pertained to impaired

**WHEN YOU'VE GOTTEN A FEW LAYERS
PEELED OFF OF YOU, BY VIRTUE OF
LEARNING YOU HAVE PARKINSON'S,
YOU'RE A BIT RAW, BUT YOU'RE ALSO SO
MUCH MORE EXPOSED THAT IT'S KIND
OF THE REAL YOU, OR MAYBE THE BETTER
YOU, OR SOMETHING UNDERNEATH.**



movement patterns, such as the one a dancer and registered nurse discovered when she found she had trouble whisking an egg. In the dance studio, the company (made up of people with and without Parkinson's disease) listened to her story while we experimented on what it was like to become the egg that is whisked, gyrating and foaming, fried and finally eaten. The movement phrase, along with several others inspired by their stories of diagnosis and treatment, was part of the dance *Shock*.

In another interview, Jenifer Peale, a retired nutritionist remarked, "It is just so much easier to say 'I love you' to people. I wonder why that is? It's like being stripped down a bit, like an onion peels off. When you've gotten a few layers peeled off of you, by virtue of learning you have Parkinson's, you're a bit raw, but you're also so much more exposed that it's kind of the real you, or maybe the better you, or something underneath." This interview turned into movement that was performed at the end of *Brooklyn's PEACE*, where a dancer stands downstage left as she gestures the peeling off of one layer at a time. A group of dancers swirl in the shape of a lotus flower behind her. As the dance comes to an end, they enfold her into the center of the flower and together they rise, stretch, and bloom out of the mud, sending love out through the theater walls, across the city and state and all across the world.

We have employed this process of listening to interviews, building movement phrases and then transforming them into evening-length works for over a decade. The dances are powerful because the work acknowledges the difficulty of the disease but also celebrates the resiliency and tenacity of the participants. As people with Parkinson's disease experience some loss in ability, I understand that selecting imagery and music that speaks to their maturity, life experience, and dignity is important. At the same time, part of

PHOTO BY MATT HABER



my artistic expression is tied to the notion of play.

Bringing together youth to work with people with Parkinson's has been a key component in introducing a sense of whimsy to what can be a heavy subject. I soon found that despite the age difference, both groups were dealing with some kind of change. Whether it be graduating from middle school or college, getting married, having children, breaking up, or dealing with a health issue, we are always adapting to life's changing circumstances. The young people learn by watching the elders, and in turn the elders are energized by the youth. Together, we have managed to create a sense of belonging through dance, among ever-changing circumstances.

dNaga's mission is to offer art programming that cultivates creativity and builds connections. We can build new pathways to problem-solving with creative thinking and help heal trauma, interrupt systemic oppression, and serve as a tool for liberation. Founded and directed by **CLAUDINE NAGANUMA**, dNaga creates work rooted in the interview process, tackling themes such as the incarceration of Japanese Americans, racial profiling, mental health, systemic issues facing our youth, medication, surgery, and palliative care. In that vein, dNaga has been offering a Dance for PD® program in partnership with Danspace since

PHOTOS BY (TOP) DIANE DEN, (BOTTOM) CLAUDINE NAGANUMA



2007, and includes intergenerational community members in their performances. dNaga's GIRL Project is in residence at EastSide Cultural Center, offering a multi-disciplinary art and empowerment program for POC girls since 2014. The dance company recently performed in Kyoto and Tokyo at the World Parkinson Congress (2019), published a book entitled *Peace About*

Life: Dancing with Parkinson's, and was included in Dave Iverson's documentary *Capturing Grace* about dance and Parkinson's disease. By culling the wisdom and personal stories of our elders, we can learn how to better care for ourselves and develop a better understanding of our world and our place within it. For more information about dNaga, please visit dNaga.org.

What is “Post-*artum*” Depression?

By PARYA SABERI, PHARMD, MAS, MFA | Photo by DAVID GAYLORD



LAST YEAR

, I graduated with a master's in fine arts (MFA) in dance. This was my third terminal degree, and extra special to me because it fulfilled a life-long goal and was totally different from anything I'd ever done before. But upon writing and creating my thesis paper and performance, I began feeling the anxiety of separation from my story, what I was sharing through my artistry, and what I was releasing into the world. It was a strange feeling but I can only compare it to a profound sadness of separation. Truthfully, I have never given birth to a human baby but I have talked to many friends and women who have told me about their intense depression after giving birth. This is how I felt in my own way. The intensity of the depression grew after graduating and the sadness remains with me to this day. It is often difficult to even talk about it because it seems silly to feel sad about being parted from one's trauma. To someone who's never experienced it, it may seem indulgent or frivolous to wallow in sadness after "birthing" art. In talking to other artists, I have come to realize that birthing one's long-held emotions through art is traumatic. Post-artum depression is real. It can be paralyzing once a project is complete and can prevent future desires to create from the heart.

Unfortunately, I don't have great solutions for dealing with this post-artum depression. But there are a few things that seem to help. First, I force myself to talk about it. I discuss among friends and in safe spaces. This allows me the chance for self-discovery and to explore what underlies my sense of longing and destitution. It has also allowed other artist-friends to open up about similar sentiments and acknowledge the lack of discussion around mental health challenges among artists. Second, I force myself to create. I make a conscious effort to get back to creating, even when my legs feel like lead, even as I flail around on the floor, and

even if the end result is crap. I rent studio space, force myself to choreograph, take dance classes, and go to lots of performances. In many ways, I am trying to fill back my proverbial cup and keep my connection to dance any way possible. Third, and most importantly, I try to show myself compassion. I give myself space and grace. We are living in an arduous and crumbling world where progress is a mirage, art is devalued, democracy is a sham, and the patriarchy still has a stronghold over every part of our lives. In this environment kindness to oneself is key to relative sanity.

For those of you who have experienced what I have described, please know that you are not alone. The road ahead is difficult, but you and your art are precious and needed in the world. Art keeps us sane and balanced. Art keeps humanity human and it is art that will save us.

PARYA SABERI is an Iranian immigrant, dancer, choreographer, researcher, educator, and healthcare professional. She is an Associate Professor at a top-ranking Bay Area university. At the age of 6, Parya began studying Iranian classical and folk dances in Iran and later trained in New York Style Salsa and belly dancing. She received an MFA in Dance from Saint Mary's College of California in 2021 and has been a member of the Salimpour School of Dance since 2012. Her dance research and interests include the restriction of movement for women dancers in Iran and cultural appropriation in dance.

PHOTO BY DANIELLE FERGUSON



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Decolonizing Industries of Care: Nursing These Wounds

by Joyce Lu

“During this pandemic, people are starting to call nurses superheroes. This makes me very uncomfortable. This is our job. We are not heroes.” —Public Health Nurse, Mylene A. Cahambing, RN, MPH

In California, one out of every five registered nurses (RN) is of Pilipinx descent.¹ These nurses are also disproportionately represented on the front lines: bedside as well as in intensive care units, emergency rooms, nursing homes and long-term care.² This situation has left these nurses more vulnerable to COVID-19 and explains why, although they make up only four percent of the overall nursing force in the U.S., approximately one third of

the nurses who have died of the virus in the United States are of Pilipinx ancestry.³

This critical yet underacknowledged population is now the subject of Alleluia Panis’ new site-specific, immersive dance performance, *Nursing These Wounds*, which premieres at Brava Theater Center Cabaret, October 21-30, 2022. Panis is the Artistic Director of [KULARTS](#), a San Francisco-based nonprofit that began as Kulintang Arts, Inc., a performance ensemble founded by Panis, along with Robert L. Henry and Marcella Pabros-Clark in 1985. In 1995, KULARTS shifted to the presenting and educational arts organization it is today, with the explicit mission of engaging the public in contemporary and tribal Pilipinx arts and culture.

Panis conceived of *Nursing These Wounds* as a way to investigate the impact of colonization on Pilipinx health and caregiving through the lens of Pilipinx nursing history.

³ “Sins of Omission: How Government Failures to Track Covid-19 Data Have Led to More Than 3,200 Health Care Worker Deaths and Jeopardize Public Health.” National Nurses United. Mar. 2021.



Filipina nurses, Red Cross Carnival Parade, Manila, Philippines, Feb. 2, 1918
American National Red Cross photograph collection, US Library of Congress @ John Tewell

Americans began establishing nursing schools in the Philippines in the early 1900s, during the U.S. occupation and colonization of these islands. Subsequently, any time the U.S. faced nursing shortages, such as after World War II and right now, Pilipinos answered the call. Although the Philippines gained its “independence” in 1946, like other previously colonized states, it continues to be bound in debt to the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other lending institutions to the tune of about \$46 billion. This economic bondage is the root of what keeps the export of Pilipinx labor flowing.⁴ “Many of

the Pilipinx nurses in the U.S. and other countries were or could have been doctors in the Philippines, but they went into nursing because they could earn substantially more by going abroad than they would have at home as doctors or lawyers,” explains Panis. In this context, the nurse who travels overseas to work becomes a commodity, or product of domestic mass production, bringing money home to the Philippine banks.⁵ Part of what *Nursing These Wounds* explores is this tension between institutional demands and the agency of the nurses themselves.

All of the artists collaborating on *Nursing These Wounds* are of Pilipinx



University of Southern California @ J. Tewell

⁵ Choy, 116.

⁴ Choy, Catherine Ceniza. *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 88.

descent and most of them have relatives and friends who are in the nursing profession. Panis' sister-in-law is a working nurse in San Diego and her cousin recently retired from a hospital in the Boston area.

Dance artist, educator, and end-of-life doula Frances Sedayao shares that her mother “was a brilliant educator” who came to the U.S. from the Philippines when she was in her late 40s:

The quickest thing for her to make money and support her family was to go back to school and become a CNA [certified nursing assistant]. But with no consideration of the health risks. She suffered from heart and pulmonary disease yet she took on a job caring for others – a circular thing which we also show in the piece – the fine line between being a caregiver and a patient—how delicate that is. My mother died early at the age of 66. She was a natural caregiver and nurturer, but she didn't prioritize her own health. Or she did the best she could. I really want to honor her in this project.

Another *Nursing These Wounds* dancer, Dre “Poko” Devis, is a second-generation movement and visual artist of Boholano and Ilocano descent. She has a Lola, or grandmother, on her mother's side who went to nursing school in the Philippines:

I believe she didn't really have a choice in that matter...she had dreams to migrate here, because that picture is painted for folks who live there that...America is better...she had five daughters and she worked her butt off... and eventually moved her whole family... If not for nursing, then I wouldn't be where I am now and I really hold that dear to my heart. This piece is diving deep into that story and it opens the door for us to really feel into the struggles of that work and the

great, great strength one must have to do that kind of care.

So how to translate all of these stories into movement?

Jess DeFranco is a dancer and dance teacher who was first introduced to Panis' work when she saw *Man@ng is Deity* last year at ODC Theater: “I was blown away. . . I just kind of fell in love, so when they put out a call for dancers, I sent in my information and now I'm working with the *Nursing These Wounds* project!”

One thing DeFranco loved so much about *Man@ng is Deity* is Panis' contemporary choreographic approach. In “Embodied Indigeneity: Translating Tradition for the Philippine Contemporary Dance Stage,” Regina Bautista describes the contemporary methodologies of several choreographers based in the Philippines. But what she describes also applies to Panis' work in the U.S.; that it is “a negotiation and exploration of the possibilities of performing Philippine dance beyond the constraints of tradition and authentic representation.”⁶

“Where we do phrases and sections that call upon Filipino folk dance,” DeFranco says, “I was kind of able to

of the pre-colonial dances—like now in my 40s.”

The nine dancers in *Nursing These Wounds* all come with various movement and performance training: hip-hop, ballet, modern, contemporary, gymnastics, martial arts, and theatre.

“With KULARTS,” says Devis, “I feel like the movement is so unique in that it's rooted in what our bodies can do, and I feel like Manay really understands that.” DeFranco adds, “She spends time really explaining her vision and what the energy is supposed to feel like.” In this way, Panis does what Bautista describes as, “keeping the embodiment of movement systems and gestures as relevant and significant to the new bodies who perform it.” Bautista also asserts that this is an inherently decolonial praxis as opposed to, say, dictating particular movements onto the dancers' bodies without any possibility of negotiation. “Exploring such possibilities in performing Philippine dance,” she explains, “continuously becomes a critical pursuit,” where the practitioner is challenged to deconstruct and recontextualize “traditional” or indigenous symbols—as opposed to simply appropriating

My mother died early at the age of 66. She was a natural caregiver and nurturer, but she didn't prioritize her own health. Or she did the best she could. I really want to honor her in this project.

get back to my roots a little bit and get access to a style of dance that I never had the opportunity to study before.” Sedayao adds that when she was growing up in Fremont, nobody there was teaching pre-colonial Pilipinx dance, “which is what I was interested in. So working with Manay⁷ I am able to learn bits and pieces

them—to create choreography that expresses the particular Pilipinx identities and/or stories being addressed in a given performance.”⁸

Panis' impact on the field of dance has been recognized by many entities, including Dance/USA, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, and the San Francisco Arts Commission which awarded her their inaugural Legacy Artist Grant in 2017.

⁸ Bautista, 161.

⁶ Bautista, Regina. “Embodied Indigeneity: Translating Tradition for the Philippine Contemporary Dance Stage.” 2017. York University. Master of Arts Thesis, 161.

⁷ In Tagalog: a respectful term of address for a woman older than oneself; like “elder sister.”



PHOTO BY HANA SUN LEE

Panis' Western dance education began when she attended Galileo High School in San Francisco. A friend took her to an afterschool program in North Beach that was led by a former Denishawn dancer, Klarna Pinska. She went on to study with other teachers, including Alonzo King and Ed Mock. Panis also joined the collective movement of artists of color in the 1970s and '80s, collaborating with artists like: the Asian American Dance Collective, Halifu Osumare, June Watanabe, and Jill Togawa. Working with the Bagong Diwa Dance Company between 1974–1982, however, is the work Panis describes as being most “dear to my heart because it was the beginning of my choreographic career.” Inspired by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Bagong Diwa was ethnically diverse in composition, but its focus was on work in

the Pilipinx American experience.

Today, Panis' work is part of a current movement among women and queer choreographers of color like Ananya Chatterjea, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Dohee Lee, Amara Tabor Smith and NAKA Dance Theater who approach dance holistically. Their works draw on their ancestry to make a kind of cultural, socio-political and spiritual sense that decolonizes to heal. In this way, the dance functions as medicine.

Another theme *Nursing These Wounds* explores is the fissure between traditional Pilipinx and Western conceptions of well-being. In my role as dramaturg for this piece, I spoke with several nurses who called for the use of ancestral medicine in general, and also particularly to help nurses with burnout.

And the burnout is dire.

I wanted to speak with more nurses in the Philippines and other countries, but the time difference combined with the crisis situation of the pandemic presented a real barrier. I was told by nurses in the Philippines and the U.S. that they were working double 12 to 16-hour shifts. At the same time, this was not a new phenomenon. Many younger nurses told me stories of their elder relatives working this same amount in order to support their families. Sedayao's mother is unfortunately not alone in terms of the negative impact of the work on her own health. Dr. Claire Valderama-Wallace, Assistant Professor in the Department of Nursing at California State University East Bay and Chairperson of GABRIELA Oakland, also cites the urgent need “to uproot racism from nursing education,” pointing out that Black, Latinx, and Pilipinx

baccalaureate nursing students currently have the highest attrition rates in California.⁹ I spoke with nurses who quit the profession because of racist bullying. I spoke with nurses who quit because of corporate greed. One such person is Bryan Philip Cruz, an emergency room nurse who quit after he contracted a severe case of COVID-19 after being supplied with one mask to use per week.

At the same time, Cruz also said, “I wouldn’t trade my experience.” What was clear and consistent across all the conversations I had with Pili-pinx nurses was a deep sense of recognition, love and respect for nursing and for each other. “It’s an honorable profession,” says Mylene Cahambing, the public health nurse quoted at the beginning of this piece: “I’m honored to be in this profession, but where is our healing space?”

Ritchel Gazo, a pediatric nurse at Kaiser who is also the Executive Director of Parangal Dance Company says, “We put up a really good image in front of everybody that we’re okay, but in all honesty we aren’t. I think it comes down to really doing a lot of self-care during this pandemic and just being honest with yourself and giving yourself that moment to let that pressure cooker out, release some of that hurt, that grief and anything you’re processing.” Dancing is part of how Gazo stays balanced.¹⁰

Sedayao noted that playing the part of a nurse in *Nursing These Wounds* is “funny” in the sense that she is finally performing her parents’ expectation, but in her own way that departs from the intergenerational expectations that were dictated by the colonial capitalist global economy. “I’m looking up to the heavens saying, ‘Ok, I can be a nurse for you.’ And it’s just so nice to work with someone who tells stories of my people in a way that is really thoughtful and genuine. . . . That in

⁹ “Nurses in the Diaspora.” KULARTS panel discussion. 21 Mar. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8F-Lueqc6ZA>.

¹⁰ Ibid.



itself is such a gift and an inspiration to me, and it makes me feel like home. I’m learning something about my family and I’m speaking and moving with people that have that innate understanding of the struggle and the joys of being Filipino.”

KULARTS presents the World Premiere of *Nursing These Wounds*
Directed and Choreographed by Alleluia Panis
Oct 21-30 at Brava Theater Center Cabaret, San Francisco
Tickets available at <https://bit.ly/ntwbrava>

JOYCE LU is a performing artist, director, and educator based in Los Angeles. She is a former member of Body Weather Laboratory LA and has performed with Oguri and Roxanne Steinberg at many venues including The Guggenheim and Getty museums. She currently practices and performs Balinese dance with Burat Wangi led by Nanik Wenten and I Nyoman Wenten. Joyce participated in a *Tribu Tur* with KULARTS in 2002 and contributed an article about KULARTS to the anthology *California Dreaming: Movement and Place in the Asian American Imaginary* (2020). Joyce received her MFA in Asian Performance from the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa and a Ph.D. in Performance Studies from UC Berkeley. She is currently an Associate Professor in Theatre and Dance and Asian American Studies at Pomona College.

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...For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you

Song Of Myself, Walt Whitman

Every morning just before dawn, from my window at the International Hotel, flights of doves descend upon the corner of Kearny and Jackson streets, and soon the dance begins. Older *Manongs* used to ask of Filipinos there, “Do they still dance on Kearny Street?” Dancing then was a community builder. Now, it is my addled friend Norman Jayo, fellow tenant, who revives the dance with pigeons. Erstwhile hero, now forgotten by the young, in the ‘70s, he coordinated the dance of the media that resulted in the human barricade on that fateful night of the fall of the hotel. The “authorities” had been banging on the doors of the hotel for nine years. That’s how long the people had been defending and protecting it and its tenants. “We won’t move! We won’t move!” It was the dance of the I Hotel, the dance of standing your ground, the Zen-like dance of immobility, when thousands around the Bay from all faiths and non-faiths, all walks of life, swooped down into Kearny Street, interlocked arms, and remained steadfast, their energies and forces of resistance reserved inside their own universe. “We won’t move! We won’t move!”

The Birdman of the I-Hotel

...I saved some crusts from the
Leftover pizza of the gathering last night.
The dough was so good.
Come by later
And take these humble crumbs
And put them in one of your bags
For your morning walks,
Manong.

You
Who soar with wild wings
of your own.¹



¹ excerpt from original poem written May 15, 2021, San Francisco

Dance must have been the first art, the first expression of human experience. We have first of all, before any tool, before words, before language, before drawings and paintings, our bodies as our tools. Dance is primordial, archetypal, and ancestral. It brings us back, grounds us in our most natural state and inclinations. And of course, dance will be our last.

DANCE AND THE WARRIOR

In *Kali*, a Filipino martial art, the movement forms we practice and which we aspire to are called *sayaw*, which literally means, “dance.” For a warrior must also be soft. Therein lies the wisdom in the sayaw of the warrior. It is the dance that teaches this principle to the warrior. The essence of a warrior is the essence of a dancer, the poise, the stature, the attitude, the dignity of composure under imminent pressure. Some folks say, “Just get a gun, no need for martial arts.” But that belies the dance in the martial arts and its complete absence in the use of a gun. What form will you be in, what stance will you have in the midst of an earthquake, a storm, a hurricane, a flood? What good is your gun in the face of these disasters? How do you kill the fear inside of you? Killing that fear is the beginning of the warrior’s dance.

I took to Kali so naturally when I encountered it for the first time in Hawaii. Snooky, our teacher, saw it the first day. Dancers see movements right way. He saw what my grandmother and my mother left in me, when I was forced to join folk dances because there were only a few boys participating, as a teenager in San Francisco. And the sword playing of my boyhood in the Philippines emerged in those movements. As a kid I used to make swords out of bamboo, not just my own, but for others. I even named their weapons. I made them, I got to name them. That was the deal. Mine was “Robin Hood”.

DANCE AND PLAY

Athletes and dancers, to me, are almost synonymous. All sports, even non-human sports, like horseracing, are poetry in motion, and what is poetry in motion but a dance? Sports is dance or it’s nothing.

I have watched my first grandchild, before she was even five, dance all day. Throughout her chores, she skips and hops and smiles and waves. I ask her to bring me something and she slides and runs and tosses her hair and exaggerates her movements because

a dance of the streets of the City. It was Loran’s dance on the shores of Manila Bay when all our clothes that he was supposed to have been watching got stolen because of the temptation of ice cream on a hot afternoon. Loran was the sharp-eyed one of our group. When things were lost we always called Loran to find it. Between blades of grass, he would spot a rusty coin or a dull, chipped, battle-wearied marble right away. But that hot afternoon, his talent did not have a chance with the ring-a-ling of an ice cream cart. He was distracted and he gave in and lost his attention,

I am a dancer who had no official lessons, a gambler with no specific training, a traveler with no vehicle, a warrior without a gun, and an athlete without a coach.

it is the dance that propels her. “Papa, you left your tea in the microwave again!” She brings me my baseball cap with a bounce and a leap, and I see my mother and grandmother dancing the *Kuratsa* in countless fiestas. And she reminded me of the tango lessons I was offered in Las Vegas that I rejected because the beautiful lady who would be my mentor and partner smelled slightly of gin and tonic. For reasons now immaterial, I never came back after that proposal. But the tango is still in my mind and someday our destiny will once again meet.

I am a dancer who had no official lessons, a gambler with no specific training, a traveler with no vehicle, a warrior without a gun, and an athlete without a coach. But I have had mentors, and have had other weapons besides a gun, traveled unmapped territories, and I have read books as frigates of imagination.

Even from a distance I see the wisdom of dance in children at play.

My last memories of the Philippines and my boyhood was a dance,

as well as our clothes. All four boys ran butt naked back home. I was in the groove of the dance of the traffic, and had no fear whatsoever, when a taxi almost hit me crossing the street. I wet myself in fear but was quickly relieved to find out that I was naked and had no pants to wet.

I left the Philippines when I had just turned twelve. A childhood Manila goodbye crush would every now and then visit this ballroom of a brain...

...*Leonore was like a Christmas card. She had something in her carriage of herself, so lithesome, so confident yet always conscious of others’ needs. She must be an “Ate”. Must be somebody’s older sister. Older sister, mother, sweetheart all-in-one. And the way she moved, subtle and graceful, especially when girls were playing that high jump game “Luksong Tinik”, where part of the unspoken game is showing how graceful one was in jumping high and yet keeping her dress down by placing hovering hands over her billowing skirt. Her face was not a real beauty but*

*her skin was cinnamon spotless and at times she wore her hair in pigtails and at other times, in a ponytail and yet at others, left long and loose.*²

The women in the countryside, or the domestic workers in the cities, would wash by a well. They have a dance when they bathe, with just a *tabo* (hand dipper), a piece of soap, one large pail or bucket of water, or if outside, standing beside a deep and running stream between the trees. They clean themselves not only with their hands, but also with their feet when they have to bend and reach those hard to get to parts of their body, like the heels, and the back of the knees. They rubbed the back of their knees with their instep, and they cleaned their insteps with the soles of their feet. Then, (I always had a hard time with this, I tried it many times), one by one, they rub the narrow part of their heels, the achilles, between the toes of the other foot, and pour water from the *tabo* little by little, just the right amount to wash and rinse away the day’s accumulated dirt there, holding their hair with the other hand as they look down behind them to see the earth wash away from their feet. Then they rub the soles of each foot on top of the opposite instep, and wash that away. Even as they step out of their baths, they skip and hop and turn and, dancers that they are, smile to a new beginning. And the smell of their shampoo from the pounded *gugo* bark would permeate the air.

DANCE, LUCK, AND HUMILITY

I play poker. Gambling is a constant temptress. And to keep gambling at bay, one must perform the dance with Lady Luck. In gambling, one has to feel the pulse of Lady Luck and sway with her, not overpowering, never losing patience, sometimes waiting it out, standing still, dancing with your destiny. So that you may take your rightful place in the Great Flow of things.

² excerpt from unpublished memoir

It’s bigger than your ego; there is no room for your hubris. Accept, say yes like Molly Bloom in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, learn humility, or it’ll crush you and toss you out of kilter like yesterday’s newspaper.

THE DANCE AT WORK

In the salmon canneries of Alaska, the unsafe, outdated machines are entangled with the workers so that people become adept and even ingenious in adjustments and facilitating. It’s 20 hours a day on average and in peak season even 24/7. I had a time card with 26 and a half hours in a day of work.

In the fish house the butchers dance with their machines at all hours. I worked in Lye Wash and a partner and I controlled the hydraulic hoist anchored by a moving ball of twenty pounds of iron. We named that moving ball Muhammad Ali. It was always swinging around eye level. One partner controls the release and stoppage of the hoist as both swing the cooler filled with 112 pounds of shining gold cans of salmon. On the seventh stack, we add a push so the rail can take away the momentum of the pile seven stack high.

Meanwhile, in the fish house where the butchers worked, hands, fingers, and feet were dancing with the salmon gushing out of hydraulic machines. Somehow, only Filipinos can do it. Only they can work these machines of the late 1800s called the Iron Chink. We all found out when we went on strike because the whites did not know how to cook rice, and we demanded that a Filipino, any Filipino, can cook it right. By noon the cannery was in a stand still losing thousands of dollars every minute. By one o’clock in the afternoon the company gave in to our demands and hired two Filipino cooks from our bunkhouse to do all the cooking from then on. I told the management, “Filipinos work like hell and work

well, but they have to eat well, too.” We took the letters from dance and embedded them in our DNA. Dance. One can see the Filipino butchers move their hips as they whip and turn over the majestic salmon they held in their working hands.

And right when the salmon season is ending in Alaska, in California farms, in the doomed and dying days of summer, around September, following the rhythms of the seasons, the grape fields begin the dance of the falling leaves. The workers lovingly and harmlessly turn over the pesky branches that get in their eyes, the better for the worker to see and work on the delicate orbs of fruit to be pruned and harvested, laying them down on their arms like a baby being rocked to sleep.

My Auntie, my mother’s youngest sister, died at 97 years-old. She was dancing and swaying and singing on her deathbed. I have videos of it! Her mother did the same. I saw them both at it when their turn came. They knew, like Jackson Browne, that the last dance, we do alone.

OSCAR PEÑARANDA was born in Barugo, Leyte, Philippines, and moved to Vancouver, Canada when he was 12 years old in 1956, when his father and colleagues opened the first Philippine Consulate in Canada. When he turned 17 years-old, his father was transferred to San Francisco, where Oscar has settled. An educator for 40 years, a writer for even more, and a Filipino all his life, he received the prestigious award *Gawad Ng Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas* (Writer’s Guild of the Philippines) for his lifetime efforts in his writings and community projects. He lives at the historic and legendary International Hotel in San Francisco.

Living in three countries and being tricultural and trilingual—speaking Waray, Tagalog and English at a young age—helped to shape Oscar’s ideas on the ambiguities of home, culture and heritage, themes he would explore in his literary endeavors and community work. He received his B.A. in Literature and M.A. in Creative Writing from San Francisco State and was part of forming that first school of ethnic studies in the nation. His works are anthologized internationally. He has two books: *Full Deck*, *Jokers Playing*, a collection of poems, and *Seasons By the Bay*, a collection of interrelated stories.



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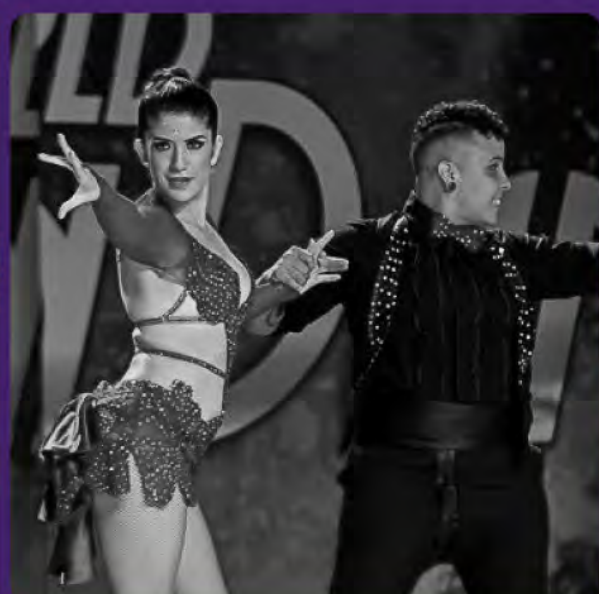


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pictured (clockwise from top left): Tania Santiago, Diamano Coura West African Dance Company, Ramon Ramos Alayo, Susana Arenas, Kara Mack, In Lak'ech Dance Academy, Bongo Sidibe, CubaCaribe



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IN CONVERSATION

WITH ANDRÉA SPEARMAN, DANCERS' GROUP ARTIST RESOURCE MANAGER

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

In this edition of *In Conversation* I was able to speak with two powerhouse women, who are longtime professional movers and makers of thought-provoking, physically dynamic dance works.

TONYA AMOS received a BA in Cultural Anthropology from U.C. Berkeley & trained four years on full scholarship at Alvin Ailey American Dance Center. A member of Actors Equity Association, she has appeared with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater & Donald Byrd, was a member of Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, Footprints & Amy Pivar Dances, performed in the International Tour of “West Side Story”, the National Tour of “Sesame St. Live”, Sacramento Music Circus’ “The King & I”, and has been featured in numerous print ads & TV commercials. She is the owner of Aspire Pilates Center, which has allowed her to work full time on bridging health and wellness and the arts with communities that traditionally don't have access. She's proud to help build cross cultural and intergenerational bridges with [Grown Women Dance Collective](#). IG: [@GrownWomenDanceCollective](#)

Tonya Amos



We know in order to break intergenerational poverty, we know if we're gonna really build as a community, it takes more than just a certification. It takes more than just a career.”

— TONYA AMOS



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SARAH BUSH creates her inimitable style of movement by combining years of training in ballet, modern, hip hop, jazz, and contact improvisation. She attended the University of Utah's Modern Dance Department for two years on the prestigious Elizabeth R. Hayes scholarship. Sarah received a degree in Dance Performance and Choreography from San Francisco State University. Since 2007, she has been the Artistic Director of [Sarah Bush Dance Project \(SBDP\)](#), a contemporary dance company based in the San Francisco Bay Area. SBDP's repertory includes *Un-Changing Nature* (2019) *Spirit & Bones* (premiered 2018), *Homeward* (premiered 2017), *This Land* (premiered 2016), and *Rocked By Women*, (premiered 2011). IG: [@SarahBushDance](#)

Sarah Bush

“The dancing that happens outside is responsive and active and alive and reflexive. And you have to make a lot of choices in the moment, even if you fully choreograph something, there's more chancest that there's a pebble under your foot or a dog runs by or a siren, whatever it is. And I think as a performer and when I work with other dancers, seeing them as performers,

— SARAH BUSH



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PHOTOS BY: (TOP) TONYA AMOS, (BOTTOM) MARIANNA JANOTVA

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Pictured: Murals of the Tenderloin (2021). Photo by Robbie Sweeny.



PHOTO BY KESAN MARLING

Sean Dorsey Dance

Sean Dorsey Dance premieres their new full-evening work *The Lost Art of Dreaming*, a powerful fusion of full-throttle dance, intimate storytelling, highly physical theater, soul stirring song, elaborate costuming and plenty of magic, Thu-Sun, Nov 17-20 at Z Space.



COURTESY JON ZWEIF

DANCEVISIONS

DanceVisions is a collective of artists and educators in Palo Alto, offering affordable instruction and rehearsal space. They present performances at least 3 times a year featuring their teachers, students, 3 resident modern dance companies, and a resident Classical Indian dance company.

THE PERFORMING ARTS ACADEMY OF MARIN

The Performing Arts Academy of Marin has been offering dance classes, performance opportunities, musical theater classes, professional training and more in the Mill Valley area for over 13 years. Fall classes start Mon, Sep 12.

CUNAMACUÉ

Huellas is a dance, theater, and music piece inspired by the ancestral dance of Son de los Diablos. The work highlights Afro-Peruvian rhythms to connect to ancestral memory, and uses instruments unique to Afro-Peruvian culture such as the Cajón, Quijada, and Cajita.

Huellas highlights the importance, history, existence, and cultural contributions of people of African ancestry in Peru as a way to reclaim and remember a history that is often invisibilized. Sat-Sun, Nov 19-20 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Oakland.

inkBoat Physical Theater and Dance

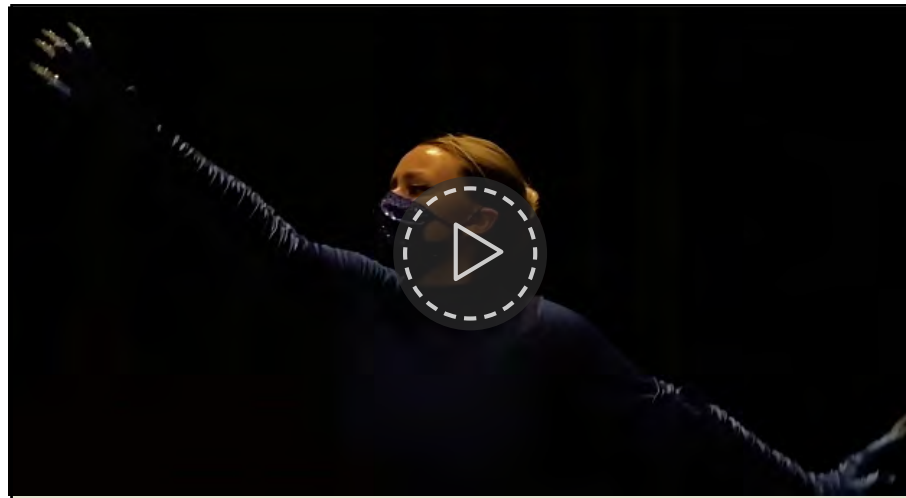
Stay tuned for community workshops in the Bay Area, February and May 2023, as well as the return of [Dance on Land](#) in July 2023.



COURTESY GAVIN TSO

Cal State East Bay

The **CSU East Bay Department of Theatre and Dance** is collaborating with [Dandelion Dancetheater](#) and multiple community arts groups to present the 2nd [Inclusive Performance Festival](#), taking place in person and online Fri-Mon, Oct 21-24.



Xochipilli Dance Company

Founded in 2022 by Héctor Jaime, [Xochipilli Dance Company](#) (XDC) is formed by a group of dancers from the Bay Area with different backgrounds and gender identities, that explores, creates, and performs original contemporary ballet pieces. As an emerging company they are looking forward to expanding their network, fundraising, and collaborating with interdisciplinary artists. Upcoming performances and donation-based online classes can be found on their [website](#).



Athletic Playground

Fall Activities for kids (ages 5+), teens and adults: Aerial (Lyra, Silks, Rope and Mixed Apparatus), Parkour, Acrobatics, Movement, Partner Acro, Flexibility, Open Play, and more.

The [Soft Acrobatics](#) workshop series, across four 90 minute classes, will explore basic acrobatic patterns that allow you to move your entire body through space. The movement patterns explored come from a variety of disciplines and are intended to be accessible and open.



Chinese Performing Arts of America (CPAA)

CPAA introduces Chinese culture as an integral part of American society through performing arts, community services, education, and international cultural events.

An annual production at San Jose Center for the Performing Arts will be held Sat, Mar 11.



Luna Dance Institute

[Luna Dance Institute](#) is excited to announce their new home at 931 Ashby Ave in Berkeley for dance innovators and life-long learners of any age and ability. Celebrate the next phase of Luna and support the renovations of their new community-based dance center by making a [donation](#) today!



MOVING ARTS ACADEMY OF DANCE

[Moving Arts Academy of Dance](#) offers a pre-professional and children's program in ballet, contemporary and classical repertory coaching, and performance opportunities in the winter and spring. Located in the Mission Terrace neighborhood of San Francisco, close to BART and Muni lines.

LOS LUPEÑOS

[Registration](#) for [Los Lupeños Academy's](#) Fall Session of Folklórico Dance Classes at the School of Arts & Culture in San José is now open. Our 10-week session runs from Oct 4-Dec 8. Tuition assistance is available so that everyone can experience Mexican folk dance.

PRAYUKTI ARTS

[Margam Unveiled](#) is a program aimed at practitioners of the South Indian art form, Bharatanatyam. It is meant to push practitioners and students of Bharatanatyam to creatively engage with the rich traditional repertoire, or the "Margam." Each *Margam Unveiled* will center on a particular type of piece from a classical Margam (ex, Alarippu, Jatiswaram, etc). Saturday, October 22. [Prayuktiarts.org](#)



Senderos

[Senderos](#) provides equitable access to cultural arts activities, educational pathways, and community resources for Latinx families. Its vision is to keep indigenous cultures and languages alive, by representing their countries of origin with pride, sharing their culture through events and performance, and contributing to the community at large. Senderos offers free folkloric dance and traditional music programs for ages 7 to adult.

Dana Lawton

Founded in 2008, [Dana Lawton Dances](#) (DLD) has produced and toured evening-length works and created a repertory that includes over 25 individual dances - all made in collaboration with musicians and visual artists. The company has toured to Southern California and internationally, including a tour in Thailand this October.





COURTESY LYDIA FEUERHELM

LYDIA FEUERHELM

Bay Area choreographer and teacher, Lydia Feuerhelm teaches a variety of [modern/contemporary classes](#) on the peninsula. Options for beginners to experienced dancers.



COURTESY RENEE FOLSON PRODUCTIONS

CONCEPT 04

[Concept 04](#) is hosting a show on Sat, Nov 12 as a choreographic salon and film screening. They are excited to be offering more community-oriented events and presenting new films in 2023, including a film collaboration with CEPRODAC in Mexico City.

DUO DANCE ACADEMY

[Duo Dance Academy](#) has begun their 2022-2023 season and is open for enrollment. They accept anyone with any skill level from ages 3 to 18, and soon to have adult classes. They are also hiring teachers specialized in tap and hip hop but are open to other techniques as well.

Please follow their [Instagram](#) for updates and announcements.



East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

[The East Bay Center for the Performing Arts](#) offers free performing arts classes for children and youth. Register online or in person at 339 11th Street in Richmond.

Fall Session Dates: Mon-Fri, Sep 19-Dec 9



PHOTO BY ILLA PITTMAN

Feline Finesse Dance Company

[Feline Finesse Dance Company](#), est 2014, is a youth sisterhood stemming from the origins of the Bayview-Hunters Point community in San Francisco. Their mission is to create a safe haven for young ladies, empowering them to reach their full potential, goals and dreams through choreography, dance fundamentals, technique and overall etiquette.




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