



WINTER 2023

indance

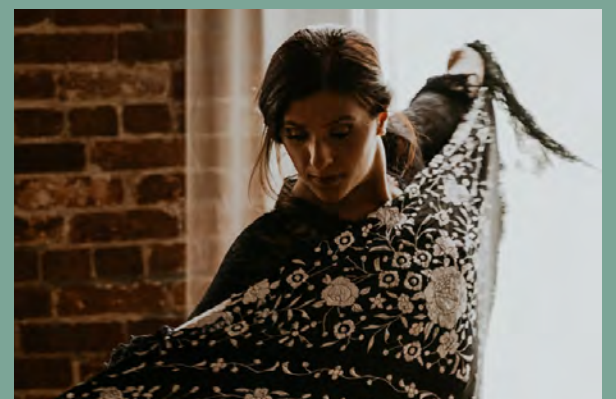
DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.30 Adapting Instead of Excluding



P.56 Dancing Rivers



P.50 Artists in Exile

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WELCOME

by [ROWENA RICHIE](#), Guest Editor



THIS IS MY THIRD AND LAST ISSUE of *In Dance* as Guest Editor. Or, as I prefer, Quest Editor. Because it has been an adventure to seek writers from all corners of our community and help them clear the path their pieces want to take.

My quest is urgent.

That's my answer to a question posed by Liv Schaffer, who wondered in the [previous issue](#) "what it's like to make something...knowing it may be the last of its kind that you make"?

I felt an urgency to explore a theme that I believe is vital to our dance community and beyond: intergenerational co-creation. So

I asked the writers in this edition to consider the concept of Sankofa.

Sankofa is a Ghanaian symbol, a bird with its feet facing forward, its long neck craned back towards its tail. An egg floats under its open beak. Sankofa roughly translates to, "Go back and get it." We owe it to the future as we owe it to the past.

I first learned about Sankofa at a [cogenerational](#) fellowship retreat that Liv and I both attended. Sankofa served as a metaphor for our cogenerational fellowship. And I thought it could be a promising theme for this beginning-of-the-year issue. The writers, writers across six generations—from 20 something, to 70+—indulged me. And they delivered.

Some invoke Sankofa tangentially: "She is covered in a many-hued garnish of boas."

Others explicitly: "Another interpretation of the Sankofa bird says...if we mistakenly overlook the past, it is okay to retrace our steps and make amends."

I grew up with the movie *Back to the Future* from 1985.

Marty McFly travels back in time to 1955 on a quest to change the course of history. At his parents' high school dance Marty finds himself onstage with the band playing guitar. He launches into an 80s-style solo, on his knees, eyes squeezed shut, jamming with abandon. Everything stops. He opens his eyes to looks of shock.

In reflecting on the power of Sankofa and the trailblazing artists among these pages, I can't help but think of Marty McFly in his urgent, electrifying moment. When he realizes the room's gone silent he blurts out this message of hope: "I guess you're not ready for that. But your kids are gonna love it."

Ready or not, here we come!

Rowena



PHOTO BY ERIKA CHONG SHUCH

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

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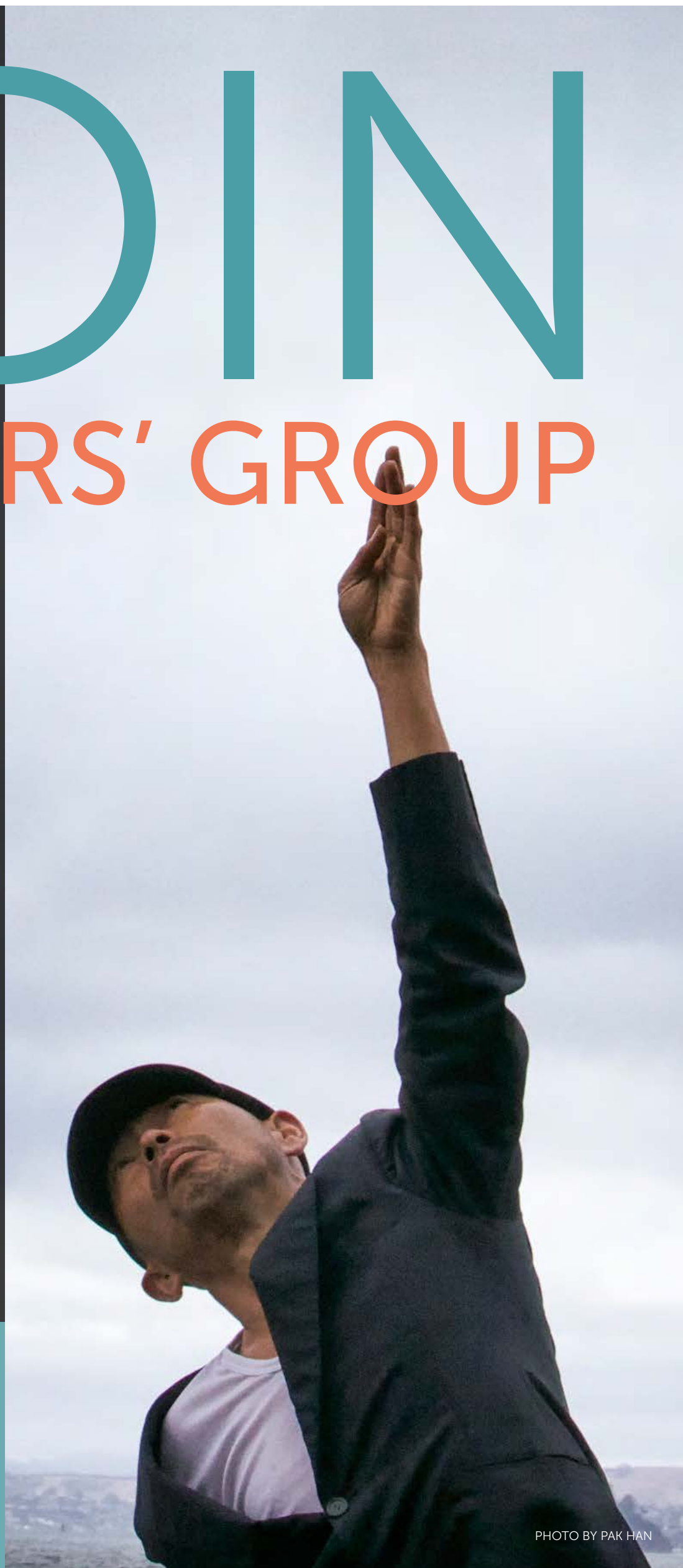


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▶ SEE VIDEO

An email exchange
between guest editor
ROWENA RICHIE
and butoh legend
HIROKO TAMANO

PUT
yourself
ON THE
beam



VIDEO BY FIELD STATION MEDIA

RR: Hi, Hiroko. I recently saw you in [The Jaws of All Are Red With Gore!](#) [a collaboration between drag performer [Silk Worm](#), movement artist Frank Leasing, and Hiroko Tamano]. I have attended a number of *Bare Bones Butoh* shows over the years. And I'm guest-editing the Dancers' Group publication *In Dance*. The theme of the next issue is "go back and get it." Or, how do we engage with our past to shape the future? Would you be interested in contributing a piece of writing? What is on your heart and mind at the moment?

HT: Good questions read out good answers.

I have questions for you.

- 1 What makes you want to step out into the wild field to find a writer on your page?
- 2 Dancing has lots of different forms, but what is the equal point?
- 3 Our World has been changing so much in the last 200 years, 100 years, 50 years, 30 years, 10 years even. 100 years from now, what can you imagine of our World, our life?

Hiroko: 🤔🌀

RR: OK, this is exactly why I invited you to write – you challenge me!

- 1 What makes me want to step out into the wild field to find a writer on my page?

We cut across diverse dance landscapes and encourage new growth on these pages. The community is invited in through the kitchen door where they see dance makers' raw ingredients–fresh verbs, process

and practice potlucks. Why do I want to find a writer on YOUR page? To capture your thoughts! Who are you? What lights you up? Where do you want to go? I am moved to draw out this dancing Hiroko voice.

- 2 The equal point of dance is the start and end. The drop out of the womb. The drop dead.

- 3 100 years from now I imagine the bog buck moth will have flickered out. Their wings, like their habitat–the once flourishing bog buckbean fields–dust. And so it goes in the dance of life. One sheds, one exits, one adapts.

Your turn! How would you answer your own questions (and a few others)?

HT:

- 1 What makes you want to step out on the written page?

🤔 When making a dance piece, words and noise-sounds build images inside dancers' bodies. Each alphabet has its own world. When the alphabets connect, they produce a common meaning. (It is a kind of Chemistry.)

Writing letters is good practice for Dancing & Life.

- 2 Dancing has lots of forms, but what is the equal point?

🐣 Dancers' soles are on the Earth. Dancers' heads are pointed to the sky. Gravity holds the dancer's body on the surface (skin) of the Earth. And at the same time, an anti-gravity wave released from the core of this planet waves through the dancer's body and extends out to outer space.

- 3 100 years from now. What can you imagine of our World, our life?

☁️ Originally, there is no such thing as something belonging to something. Each and every life respects its own dew drop like life. The morals are in common. Trust leads to peace of mind.

- 4 Where does movement begin and end?

🌀 Starts at the birth of our Universe. Ends when the perfect silence meets the pure black space.

- 5 What is the origin of Butoh?

Sincerity, Sympathy & Care. 愛(ai): 3 legs spiral up to Heart (心). The 3 legs are Past, Present & Future. 心(kokoro) is the spinning disk in side of our chest. It has 3 fire flames: one in the center, and the right and left end have one each. When the 3 spaces and times spiral up into the heart, strong beams are released above. Put yourself on the beam.

- 6 How have you resettled Butoh in the Bay Area?

In 1976, the "Japan Now" exhibition at SFMOMA was the first BUTOH appearance in the USA, by Koichi Tamano. In 1979, we settled in Berkeley, CA. So many people support each other...ALL we were YOUNG!

- 7 What are your hopes for the future of Butoh?

🌱 Soil starts absorbing spring-sun and melted snow water. Winter snow melts, changes shapes and disappears.

Nutritious water lets the innocent seeds wake up.

- 8 Why are Butoh and Drag performance wonderful compliments?

💖 Both have honesty and myth.

RR: I love your Japanese lessons. More please! Are there characters for Honesty? Myth? Butoh? Drag?

HT: Drag: 薬· Inside of bushy tree, there is a happy bird singing. <すり·

This weekend we will review Koichi Tamano's choreographed work "Swamp" (1979). We plan to dedicate it to SF Zen Center's first annual Butoh & Zen Event.

Hiroko 🌈 < Nice Rain Today 🌱

RR: It was wonderful attending the first-ever butoh performance at the Zen Center.

My friend who is a Zen practitioner was really excited about bringing in a butoh performance because she said there is so much sitting in Zen practices, but not that much movement. How could this joint meeting open up both butoh and Zen practices, do you think?

HT: Thank you for sending Wind to me.

Writing is awakening my brain.

Zen Center's gig was very good timing.

It was a clear step for each person. Zen is mindful and But-Oh! is windful.

Zen is a wild thing originally. Hi. 🐦📺 I will send you more very soon. [later that night. Subject line "BUTOH:"]

Eager to exist like weeds. Dandelion! Wanna take a seat where you're sprayed with the splashed water by a thirsty wolf.

Good & Bad are equal. So, carry no judgment. Zen-zen! (none at all).

What about many stories from masses of bodies?

From the beginning, why do we have a body?

When light moves, shadows change the form to a two dimensional world.

In our daily life, those strange two dimensional lives are connected to three dimensional objects. When I walk down a street, my shadow connects to the shadow of a tree on a sidewalk. So, I extend this black flat myself into Tree.

Then, both agree we are the same.

Rewind: Three dimension – Two dimension – One dimension – Zero dimension...

Forward: Three dimension – Four dimension...

Try to imagine a four dimensional myself.

Three dimensional me must be a kind of shadow of the four dimensional me. It may be a floating Amoeba, a space Fungus.

While sleeping, dreaming, imagining, meditating...we travel through our own dark space to go somewhere or to something. Unexpected visitors come.

Fifth dimension! Oh! I don't know. Telepathy might be common sense there.

As far as following those words and sentences, what makes everything connected?

Vibrations))))))))))) That's it!

When I say something, the sound releases into the air and keeps spreading. Even though it gets thinner and harder to hear, the waves keep going. Finally, it reaches the skin of our Universe and bounces back.

The sound keeps traveling back across the Universe and reaches me.

It takes about 200 years, about 7 generations of human life.

200 years later, my human body is already gone, so the sound affects my 7th generation children.

I look back on my fortunate life. 200 years ago, who was my ancestor who said the words of love?

On the other hand, misfortunes might be an appeal from our ancestors. It must be solved. That is why chanting prayers keeps existing for thousands of years.

Panting happily, a girl shakes her body, seems to have just arrived over a desert.

Words fall into the infinite depth of her body.

From the depth, words rise up, metamorphose into many different matters. Strangely her body blows and shrinks.

View "fissioning Moon" again & again = view my body getting kneaded up from one cell...then find the extraordinarily miserly in the back-room of a sheep-pen.

My eyeballs are so easy to be tricked. I have been viewing a variety of illusions.

Longing, unhappiness.
(What an impiety to parents.)
Want, corruption.
Must go down into Hell!
(No guarantee of safe return.)
Vomit. Mock. Forget oneself.
Easy to get flatter.
Self-conceit. Self-righteousness.

Encounter with Koichi Tamano.

He was born one year after World War II's end at the foot of Mt. Fuji by the big [Ooi] river.

His father was a piano tuner and mother was a spinner.

He was the 9th child of the family, but only 3 brothers remained in those days.

After finishing junior high school, he started working as a lathe turner.
Then, he moved to Tokyo, where a year before, the Olympics was boomed.

While working at a cabaret, he saw a floor show which was beautiful & thrilling. That was an encounter with Butoh Founder Hijikata Tatsumi.

18 year-old Koichi entered Hijikata's dance studio.

27 year-old Koichi's recital was produced by his teacher Hijikata.

In the program note, Hijikata praised him, "This innocent child was the gift from his parents to weave a beautiful Butoh tapestry without lack of ignorance and misery."

After he left his teacher's studio he connected with Artist Union of Japan (mostly conceptual artists). He pulled Butoh into the Art scene. (In the early 70's Butoh was totally underground.)

In 1976 SFMOMA had an exhibition "Japan Now." It featured many Artist Union members and the first appearance of Butoh Koichi Tamano. In the audience were seated Allen Ginsburg, Donald Philippi (aka Slava Ranko) and others.

My eyeballs are so easy to be tricked. I have been viewing a variety of illusions.

Many flickers...they are my dogs, cats, friends, gold fishes, plants, Pa, Ma, Gran-Pa, Gran-Ma...they inspire me, raise me.

43 years ago, I cut through wind and landed on this continent.

The continent accepted me and gave me big time & space.

Saying "YES" to myself makes my life so wealthy. That's what I keep telling myself. Because, I can regret it later, not now.

From the criterion of mythical, everything is acceptable.

We enshrine something and do ceremonies and festivals.

舞 Bu: Spin & get trance
踏 Toh: Step on the sun reflecting on water and splash!

I have a big appreciation for this Land. It gives me a lot!
I'm writing this on Thanksgiving night.
Hiroko 🐦

HIROKO TAMANO

1952: Born in Fukuoka prefecture of Japan, as the 2nd daughter of a farm family.

AGE 2, adopted by a Literature family.

AGE 8, the family moved to Tottori prefecture. Snow country.

AGE 18, entered Art University in Tokyo.

AGE 20, entered Butoh founder Hijikata Tatsumi's studio.

1972: Dance debut in Hijikata's work at Kyoto University West Auditorium.

Hijikata's work "27 Evenings for Four Seasons" in Tokyo.

1973: Started living with Koichi Tamano.

1976: A daughter was born.

1979: Moved to the USA. Settled in Berkeley, California.

1980s: Arch Studio, Mabuhay Gardens, Theater Lab, Eureka Theater, SFMOMA, Canada tour, etc.

1981-'85: Worked at Moon Basket Futon Shop under Fusako de Angelis.

1990s: Japan tour, Europe tour, SF Butoh festivals, "Camp Winnarainbow" under Wavy Gravy.

1995-2012: Country Station Sushi Cafe owner.

2017: The first annual "Life & Death Celebration" Butoh gathering.

BUTOH WORKS WITH KOICHI TAMANO: "Fetus of Nature" (1988), "Piece on Earth" (1989), "MandaLove" (1992) and others!



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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



KARA MACK
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IF THEY DON'T GIVE YOU A SEAT AT THE TABLE, MAKE YOUR OWN TABLE¹

By OLIVIA WINSTON and MADISON LINDGREN

With its feet deeply rooted forward and its head turning back towards an abandoned egg, the Ghanaian symbol of the Sankofa bird serves as a guide for connecting with the past to understand how we can positively shape the future. That is, to know our histories can help us to better understand our present selves and how we fit into the world around us. It is a reminder to keep moving forward while showing reverence to those in the past who have taught us how to survive, grow, and uplift ourselves and each other.

In the ballet world, this reverence is manifested through a fight for more seats at the table for ethnically, culturally, and racially diverse dancers, choreographers, and

artists. This is in part because of the ever-growing number of people, like us, who identify with more than one ethnic or racial background and are exhausted by the privilege and entitlement of white voices dominating the space at the head of the table.

The complexity of existing between two cultures becomes even more complicated in a dance world that glorifies Eurocentric ideals of beauty and upholds white supremacy. Along with favoring white dancing bodies, Western dance techniques are usually taught in an authoritarian manner, which creates a power dynamic between teacher and student and can foster an environment of abuse, fear, and discrimination.

¹ A nod to Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to be elected to the US House of Representatives, who famously said, "If they don't don't give you a seat at the table, bring in a folding chair."

PHOTO BY STEVE DISENHOF

Western dance ideals have had a strong influence on our training: how we receive and process information, prioritize individuality over community, experience feelings of belonging and representation, and regard teachers' and other students' boundaries. As our ideas of artistry evolve, we endeavor to develop more awareness of the conditioned understandings and inherent biases that the white supremacy culture of the dance world upholds.

Rather than respecting the physical, emotional, and cultural boundaries of others, we often see those in positions of power fail to accept accountability for violating the boundaries of those with less power. These hierarchical power imbalances promote a culture of perfectionism and emphasize individual thoughts over collective needs, instilling shame and fear in mistake-making rather than appreciation for the natural processes of learning.

On the contrary, non-Western cultures often use community as a structure and value inclusivity and diversity, giving everybody a place in dance regardless of who holds the most power, experience, and knowledge in the room. Differences are embraced, with the recognition of power *with* each other rather than power over each other.

OLIVIA:

"You have good legs and feet for a Black girl."
 "Wow, you can actually get over your [pointe-shoe] box!"
 "You look too athletic for ballet."
 "I thought you did hip-hop."

These and similar comments have been directed towards me and other dancers of color, by white people, and are rooted in the historic, racist belief that ballet is solely for white dancing bodies.



It's a well-known fact that Black and Brown artists have struggled and continue to struggle with recognition and acceptance in society, and it is glaringly obvious in the ballet world. The subtle and sometimes outright blatant racism in this elitist artform makes pursuing a Western dance career a challenging and often discouraging experience for dancers of color, which is why there is still a struggle for many of us to feel like we belong.

Ballet is stubborn in its attempt to remain in the 16th century by upholding Eurocentric ideas and traditions. But with the growing racial tension and divide in the United States due in part to police brutality and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement, it is increasingly important that companies give voice and representation to all different people, and reflect the diversity of society. Fortunately, there are organizations like Nashville Ballet that are doing the work to, "abolish racial inequalities in ballet," and individuals such as [Lauren Anderson](#), [Katlyn Addison](#), and [Misty Copeland](#) who have broken barriers. But as a biracial Black woman, somewhere deep inside, is always a fear that there is not a place for me in this Eurocentric art form.

I was adopted by white parents and grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood, so I have always existed between two worlds. I have often felt the challenge of being pulled in two directions while also being pushed away and never completely fitting in: not white enough for some, not Black enough for others. The ballet studio was a place where it seemed like my Blackness stood out the loudest. I didn't have any peers who looked like me and even at summer intensives, I was usually one of only a handful of dancers of color in the program. I sometimes found myself wondering if I was there because of my talent or to fulfill a diversity quota.

As I explored my future in dance, I feared there would not be a seat for me at the table.

The table. What is the table? I've always thought of the table as a symbol of a place where people are given equal opportunities to be respectfully heard and have their opinions valued – a catalyst for change. But who is given a seat? Who is being represented?

After years of being the only Black person in the room, I came to believe the table was only occupied by a myriad of whiteness, a place where I would never be welcomed. A place in ballet where successful and perfect dancers, according to Eurocentric beauty standards, get to sit. Balanchine once said,

"Ballet is woman," but in Chloe Angyal's book, [Turning Pointe](#), she expresses that isn't the whole truth: "Ballet is white woman, or, perhaps more precisely, white *womanhood*. Ballet is a stronghold of white womanhood, a place where whiteness is the default and white femininity reigns supreme."

The first time I was surrounded by dancers who looked like me I was sixteen years old. I was attending the LINES Ballet Summer Program and it was the first time I had a Black ballet teacher, the first time I was encouraged to embrace my ethnicity, be comfortable in my skin, and to use it to inspire my artistic self. Prior to that summer I had given in to self-doubt and the entrenched, exhausting racism of ballet, and had taken a break from dance. I remember feeling for the first time that I was a part of a bigger community. And with that came a renewed confidence that I belonged in that creative space.

As a dancer, one of my goals is to determine what I have to say as a creator and a human being. In order for me to do this, I have to understand and embrace what my history is and who I am. I have to explore the complexities of a biracial identity, pair that with the complexity of being an artist in a racist world, an artist pursuing ballet, and bring my unequivocal uniqueness to my creative process. I am just beginning to understand what it means to be a Black woman in society and in the dance world, and the privilege and responsibility that I have to continue the work of those who have come before me. I am also learning that people have the power to make their own tables – to transform their history, their culture, and their otherness into beautiful and intriguing stories. In order to build my table I need to do the work to create my own community and provide a safe and inclusive space for everyone to contribute. While this may be daunting at times, I know how much representation has meant to me, so I owe it to those who come after me to continue in this work.

MADISON:

As a second-generation Filipino-American, I am constantly reconstructing my own cross-cultural identity and navigating the spaces I fit into. Ethnic identity is at the core of how many third culture individuals define their experiences and think about their future ambitions and desires. "Third culture" refers to the dual identity an individual experiences when they are influenced both by their parents' culture and the culture in which they were raised. Embracing the liminal space between overlapping American and Filipino cultures and exploring my identity

as a dancer is a constantly evolving journey into my heritage and how that impacts my work as an artist.

In a world where full-time company positions are fleeting, with only a small percentage of dancers making it into the "protection zone" these positions offer, I'm starting to think more broadly and creatively about other ways I can build a career as an artist.

I was recently given the opportunity and space to explore my own choreography, which gave me firsthand experience as to how dance can be a vehicle into other expressions of art-

istry, and how I can connect modalities of other dance styles into my own practice. It is so easy as an artist to do what I already know, but there is so much outside of this small bubble I train in that can feed and inform my work.

When I have exhausted my own creative devices and habits, I can look to a different form of dance to help me expand and play with the expressivity of the language I already know. For example, I can gain inspiration from cultural dances such as the Tinikling, the bird-like national dance of the Philippines that carries deep historical meaning, characterized by rhythmic sequences of hops between two bamboo poles. I can then research how I can reignite my own creative instincts

with this dance that has a distinct cultural context, with its own original properties, by reframing the steps I've learned and considering them differently through the lens of my own movement practice, while honoring the Tinikling's origins. Paying tribute to long-standing traditions of my past by giving them a place in my current work allows me the opportunity to express a unique identity while also honoring my family who has supported my dancing dreams.

Throughout history, Philippine folk dances have been performed to show reverence to ancestors, celebrate significant life moments, and build relationships within and across communities. Today, folk dance is used to rediscover and preserve the rich history of indigenous cultures in the Philippines. It is a way of physically encrypting the storage of information, generating awareness, remembering the past, and making the body a repository of both knowledge and memory. What interests me most about community-engaged practices like folk dance is the potential to address social issues and spark dialogue by amplifying many culturally and ethnically diverse voices through movement and collaboration.

As I continue to develop my artistic voice, I aspire to detach myself from the self-serving aspects of dance and

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– A CATALYST FOR
CHANGE.**



delve into the core values and potentials of the arts to help others. Community-based work is often an entry point into becoming artist-citizens—responding to the interests and needs of the communities around us by connecting who we need to be, with who we intrinsically are. I believe art can be/should be a reflection of the human condition, so it is our responsibility to utilize our art to make genuine efforts towards change. I am seeking spaces and opportunities to build relationships with other artist-citizens.

To gain perspective on community-oriented practices and how they relate to my dance path and cultural lineage, I interviewed someone who is a true embodiment of an artist-citizen: [Parangal Dance Company](#) Artistic Director and choreographer Eric Solano.

Born in the Philippines and raised in the Bay Area, Solano uses Philippine folk dance as a vehicle to uplift the identities of over 30 indigenous communities in the Philippines and to more deeply understand his heritage. “Our work is centered on past cultures and traditions and how they serve as a pure understanding of who I was, who I am, and what I want to do in moving the community forward and giving back to those we have learned from,” Solano told me in an interview.

As the company continues to transform, Solano balances his own ideas and visions with maintaining the integrity of the original movement he learns from indigenous people during immersion trips to the Philippines. Solano explains that the company goes through a review process in building trust with the communities, adjusting until they receive a final blessing from the elders to ensure the performed dance

remains as authentic as possible. He vocalizes his responsibility to pay tribute to tradition rather than replacing or erasing it, critical when redesigning dances for performance. In centering community-engaged projects, Solano says, “Our work is not about me. It’s more about acknowledging the talent, skills, and commitment from the members of the company and leveraging that to help them develop into their own artistic voices and potentials, not just for the company, but also for the communities they work with.” Rather than looking at the artist as an individual, they are a part of a whole community.

Solano speaks about navigating a distinctive cross-cultural identity of both American and Filipino cultures and how that informs his aspirations as an artist-citizen. “On paper I am American, because I need to be able to survive and adjust to the rules of this country, but my heart, my mind, and my soul are Filipino, [which impacts] the projects I do, how I’m going to help people, and how I can uplift communities.”

Solano also discusses the racism towards and within the Filipino community. One of the pieces Parangal is cultivating for next year embodies the Tarog Ati people of Guimaras, an island province in the Philippines, and the discrimination and exploitation they experience because of the color of their skin. Relating it to the symbol of the Sankofa bird, he says, “This is who we were, this is who we are still, and this is who we are going to be, so what has to change if we are going to keep moving forward?” These Tarog Ati communities don’t have a seat at the table, a space where they are recognized and accepted. Solano strives to advocate for more visibility for these groups and their stories. Through their work, Parangal Dance Company has created

PHOTO BY STEVE DISENHOF

not only a table of their own, but also a table for others in the community who are otherwise unseen and unheard.

Another interpretation of the Sankofa bird says: it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot; meaning, if we mistakenly overlook the past, it is okay to retrace our steps and make amends. Solano elaborates, “Now you’re not just responsible for your art, you’re responsible for people’s living cultures. The process of learning and unlearning is not about the mistakes, but rather about the opportunity to make change, because you can’t change the past.” He acknowledges what he didn’t know when he began his dance journey at age 15, and recognizes how he can still change today to continue to improve his ways of learning. “The world has changed. The access to information has changed. The access to the village and culture-bearers has changed, so we also need to change our process to keep the cultural integrity of the work.” For instance, Solano staged a bird dance back in 1993. Today, the dance is still being performed, but its cultural integrity is now better preserved through research and guidance directly from indigenous communities.

As for the future of dance, Solano aims to continue to decolonize the system and encourage self-identity through his art. Parangal is the first Filipino folk dance group to be awarded a [New England Foundation for the Arts National Dance Project grant](#), and Solano also dreams of more funding to better pay artists as well as continue to prioritize indigenous community members in his work. Furthermore, he anticipates a “cultural revolution,” a term coined by Cirilo “Sapi” Bawer, also known as Papa Bawer, a culture-bearer of the Kalinga community. Solano hopes that through the medium of dance, more Filipinos embrace and take pride in who they are. “We have a lot of work to do, and hopefully the younger generations join the mission so that we can continue in our cultural revolution and in the renaissance in Philippine art, culture, and our own people.”

Through exploration of my own responsibility in this cultural revolution, I am committed to the process of nurturing my artistic intention to advocate for social change and elevate the culturally diverse communities around me.

MADISON AND OLIVIA:

Dance can be a competitive, demanding, and inequitable field, but we are fortunate to have built a close empathetic friendship in which we challenge one another, give each other the courage to uplift our individual identities,

and share inspiration and imagination. We are currently in our second and final year of the LINES Training Program, and for this past year and a half we have bonded over our similar experiences as biracial artists to which few of our classmates can relate.

However, this feeling of otherness is not all that drew us to each other; we also hold comparable morals, work ethics, and excitement relating to dance and future ambitions.

Cultivating relationships with mentors, teachers, and peers that foster understanding, encouragement, and guidance when mistakes are made is necessary in the development of an artist. We believe it is important to have a community that supports one other to impact change and make more seats available at our table. “Creating your own table will take a lot of work, a lot of courage,” Solano reflected. “You can be put down, you can be ignored, a lot of doors will close, guaranteed...But what’s

important is the progress you have made in that journey, and if we’re lucky enough we have the people by our side to join that journey.”

Our hope is that artists become so valuable to their communities, and communities become so valuable to the artists amidst them, that we are able to protect each other and continue to improve the condition of the arts in American society. As our understanding of what is possible for the future of a life in the arts evolves, we strive to become more in tune with our pasts. We intend to have a positive impact on the present and future generations of artists, and look to the Sankofa bird as a guide for gaining understanding from the past to collectively shape the future.

OLIVIA WINSTON is a dancer based in San Francisco. Originally from Salt Lake City, Utah, she received her training in the Ballet West Professional Training Division and is currently in the Alonzo King LINES Ballet Training Program. Olivia has had the opportunity to learn and perform works by Kameron Saunders, Keelan Whitmore, Penny Saunders, Carmen Rozenstraten, Chuck Wilt, and Mike Tyus. She has received additional training over the summers at Hubbard Street Dance Company, American Ballet Theater, Ballet West, Houston Ballet, and ArtÉmotion.

MADISON LINDGREN was raised in Lubbock, Texas where she began her training at Ballet Lubbock. She then continued her education at the University of Utah and the Alonzo King LINES Ballet BFA Program at Dominican University. Madison is presently in the LINES Ballet Training Program, where she has had the opportunity to perform new works by faculty and guest choreographers, as well as explore her interests in her own choreography. Madison has also trained at programs such as the Jacob’s Pillow Contemporary Program, School of American Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Miami City Ballet, and Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet.

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A JOURNEY TO BE AT HOME WITH OURSELVES

BY MICHAEL FRENCH



IS THERE any place on the planet more misunderstood, more misused, unknown, mistaken, proclaimed, mythologized and unresolved than the continent of Africa (the answer is ‘no,’ btw)? When you throw the blurry vision and the blurry romance of the African diaspora into the mix, who, despite our best intentions, despite how hard we try to resist, still hold onto a dream that one day, *one day*, we will all be back together again and everything’s gonna be alright, then you have a journey and a conversation that has no end in sight.

For the time it takes you to read this article, the extraordinary artists of Gbedu Town Radio will be our guide and our conscience as they leave the concrete of Oakland for the concrete of Nigeria, and wade through the thorny history of where Africa and America merge and separate, and then merge and separate again. I’m no genius, but I think it’s safe to say that it’s gonna be quite a ride.... But I’m getting ahead of myself...

PHOTO BY ASHLEY ROSS

dancersgroup



TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING...

In what now looks like an age of reckless innocence, 2009 to be exact, as Obama wrestled with Wall Street and the three-headed monster of the Great Recession with a nobility that was quaint at best, deluded in truth, Nkeiruka Oruche, Tossie Long and Kola Shobo were conjuring up [Bakanal de Afrique](#). Bakanal was a street based revelry of art and culture that celebrated the Afro-urban experience in all its raucous diversity. The reaction from their east Oakland community was immediate and explosive. Then came Afro-Urban Dance Experience, Gbedu Town Radio, and a whole host of classes and workshops. Suddenly there was a wild fire of programs and performances that somehow found the sweet spot between social justice, education, and pure artistic expression. With each event the word of mouth grew louder and louder. Sometimes it came with the hollering of Black American music from the 60s, Afrobeat, Soukous, Funk or Highlife. Sometimes with the waistlining hips of coupe decale, or dancehall, or ndombolo, or poppin', or

steppin,' or boogaloo. Whatever it was and whenever it was, the hunger for it was clear; A fuse had been lit, a conversation started, and it was 'let's kick out the jams brothers and sisters' all over the Bay Area!

Fast forward to 2022 and blow straight past all the program developments: the design and tech fellowships, Onye Ozi, Black Box, kids camps, the 'Notable & Notorious Nigerian Women' coloring book, writing workshops, 'Mixtape of the Dead and Gone,' and the creation of Afro Urban Society. Actually, let's back up a couple of steps to [Afro Urban Society](#) for a minute. Says it all, doesn't it: *AFRO URBAN SOCIETY!* Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Nkeiruka, the founder and artistic director of Afro Urban Society, created the company to house the expanding programs and events and give them somewhere to go, someplace to be, a home. Says it all, doesn't it: *AFRO URBAN SOCIETY!* This is why in 2022 with America struggling to believe that 'This is America,' the only thing that made sense to Nkeiruka when looking out at the horizon was to pack up their bags, gather their instruments, their

promises, their hopes, their unanswered prayers, and unanswered dreams, and head 8,000 miles east to Nigeria. Says it all, doesn't it. The only thing that made sense was a journey back to Nigeria to reconnect with the dance and Igbo¹ cultural traditions of their ancestors. As with all ideas of true and spiritual beauty, there were others thinking the same thing, and so it was that Afro Urban Society's travel exchange for creatives to experience Africa's dynamic cultures was born. As Nkeiruka said, 'A time comes when you have to Pull Up, Show Out.'

TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING AGAIN...

With little more than two weeks until they step aboard their flight to Lagos, I sat down with Gbedu Town

Radio members Nkeiruka Oruche, Kanukai Chigamba, Ebonie Barnett, Roshonda Parker, Uzo Nwankpa, and Jameelah Lane for what is likely to be just the beginning of a very long conversation.

Michael: Okay.... So, you're going to Nigeria to reconnect with the dance and Igbo traditions of your ancestors, and I get that, makes sense, but Why now?

Nkeiruka: Ohhhhh! Okaaay.... There are so many responses... I've reached a boiling point, both personally and in society, y'know. I'm daily thinking of the mortality of my parents. The loss of loved ones is not just about people, they also take with them the questions that you can never ask, the mysteries that you can never solve. Some of the ancestors are gone with them as well. I can't wait another day! Right now, I don't have anything to offer to my children. I'm too ill-equipped. I don't have the muscle to embody ancestral ways.

The only thing that made sense was a journey back to Nigeria to reconnect with the dance and Igbo cultural traditions of their ancestors.

Michael: And you told me this trip is only part of a larger project.....?

Nkeiruka: Yeah, [Obi-gbwara'm](#). The literal translation is 'I am broken hearted,' though my alternative title is 'What happens when you die.' Obi-gbwara'm is a project about learning and teaching traditional Igbo practices around death and grieving. Y'see, that's the thing, there are some things that can't be told, y'know? No matter what we say or do, there are just some things that cannot be told. The artis-

tic part of the trip – the dance, the music, is almost an excuse for the spiritual part, and the spiritual part is doing the critical work of learning and documenting the Igbo practices that folks here and folks there have discarded or taken for granted, and you can only do that on the ground.

Roshonda: I came to Afro Urban for the dance, but I always knew that it would be not just dance, that there's more to it than that, that I'm gonna learn.....

Nkeiruka: If you're going to be a vessel for the information, a carrier, or the representation of the work, you have to cut out the middle person at some point, the translator, and have your own experience with the source.

Uzo: Yeah, for me, this is the first time I'm going home with a different hat on.

I'm going as an artist and I've been dreaming about this since I was, I dunno, since I came to this country – that someday I'll be able to go back to Nigeria and study dance and my culture in a way that is seen as valuable.

Nkeiruka: Y'see, everyone who's coming has their own responsibilities, their own context and that's the beauty of the project, that there's a diverse group of experiences, ages, and relationships connected to their African sensibility. We're all going to be seeing the same thing, yet experiencing separate things and so you have to be there for yourself. Otherwise, by the time it comes to me, comes to you, it's a placebo, right?

Michael: Ha! That's funny. I hear you – So, Jameelah, Roshonda, you're the only ones that have never been to Africa, right?

Jameelah: Yeah.

Michael: How does it feel to know that – and I'm going to put my word in here, that you're finally going?



Gbedu Town Radio Ensemble
(L - R) Yung Phil, Kanukai Chigamba, Ebonie Barnett,
Uzo Nwankpa, Moses Omolade

PHOTO BY ANSEL ROSS

¹ The Igbo People are an ethnic group in Nigeria. They are primarily found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States. Traditional Igbo religion includes belief in a creator god (Chukwu or Chineke), an earth goddess (Ala), and numerous other deities and spirits as well as a belief in ancestors who protect their living descendants.



Roshonda: Mixed emotions, of excitement and uncertainty.... Like, um, like not scared, but, um, what’s another word for scared?

Jameelah: Anxious?

Roshonda: Yeah, that too.... I was going to go to Angola for dance, but the pandemic hit and my flight was canceled.

Jameelah: It’s just now feeling real.... when my passport came yesterday.....
It makes me think about my parents, my siblings, the folks who have never traveled in my family....

Ebonie: This will be my first time going with folks I know. The first time was to Senegal for dance and I didn’t know anyone.

Jameelah: I’m excited to see the people... I feel like a strong calling, like there’s this missing piece to my story, a piece to a puzzle, just about our ancestors and slavery, so I’m feeling like, um – also the similarities, as a Black woman in America, just going over there and seeing how we all move together....

Michael: Is anyone frightened that they’re going to get there and find out that damn, I’m too American for Africa..... ?

Jameelah: Nooo.....

(Silence)

Roshonda: The Africans here look at us differently, so I’m sure they’re going to look at us differently over there.

Michael: An African American friend of mine told me that the only place he’s seen as American is in Africa.

Ebonie: I agree.

Michael: Speak on that.

Ebonie: When I went to Africa the first time there were maybe five Americans, including myself, some Africans, and there was also some Black folks from around the diaspora. The Americans and the other folks from the diaspora got along, the Africans got along with people from other parts of the diaspora, but the Africans didn’t like the Americans. The Africans from the continent didn’t understand why I knew what they knew, which was interesting.... but the Africans from the continent did the stuff that we do here in America, does that make sense? Dancewise, they were doing poppin n lockin and shit, but they didn’t like that I could do African movement, yet their main style of dancing was poppin n lockin, but they had no understanding of the culture behind it. I’m not going there with no kind of anything, I feel like I’ve done that before – last time I thought it was gonna be a ‘coming home moment,’ and niggas was like, ‘Errrr....?’ ‘What the fuck! Hahahaha! So, it’s like, I dunno what to expect, hahahha.....

stand why I knew what they knew, which was interesting.... but the Africans from the continent did the stuff that we do here in America, does that make sense? Dancewise, they were doing poppin n lockin and shit, but they didn’t like that I could do African movement, yet their main style of dancing was poppin n lockin, but they had no understanding of the culture behind it. I’m not going there with no kind of anything, I feel like I’ve done that before – last time I thought it was gonna be a ‘coming home moment,’ and niggas was like, ‘Errrr....?’ ‘What the fuck! Hahahaha! So, it’s like, I dunno what to expect, hahahha.....

Nkeiruka: It’s gonna be interesting because going there with this group – I’m not going to be there with my family, y’know, where I’m just one of many and not really noticed. I’m gonna be vibing off what we have and be in that comfort zone – it’s a way, y’know what I mean? It’s a

way that we have and I’m gonna be in that way....

Jameelah: Yeah, When you originally asked the question I said ‘no,’ ‘cus I was thinking about this idea of blending in, but listening to Ebonie and Nkei speak, I’m like, yeah, I coming out there like a California girl, but I’m not gonna be like some boujee bitch, y’know! Hahahaha...

Uzo: But you will be, hahahah!

Jameelah: No, yeah, right!? Hahaha! I started thinking about that too, hahaha... Like, when I went out to Haiti they had a different way of doing things, like washing clothes! It took me all day to wash my clothes and they were like, ‘do you want me to do it for you?’ and Imma, ‘No! I got it,’ hahaha.....!

Michael: Uzo?

Uzo: Yeeaaah....

Michael: Hahahaha, I like that tone...

Uzo: This is so interesting ‘cos I struggle with the identity issues too. I speak one of the languages, but even with that – I’m not fluent, I do my best, but there’s all these dialects and it takes but two seconds before they go, ‘Ooooooh, she’s not from around here – Imposter!’ Hahaha! So, then I have to prove that I am, prove that I’m not, depending on the spaces I’m in... Some spaces I wanna flex, y’know, because it gets shit done, but then other places you don’t want them to know you’re American so the code switching is real! It brings up a lot of insecurities for me – ‘Where am I from, for REAL!’

Michael: Kanu, it must be different for you as I assume you go back and forth pretty regularly....

Kanukai: Um, Um, Um, I’m looking forward to, um, I’m trying not to have too many expectations and I’m trying not to have the confidence of ‘I’m African...’

Michael: I love the way you put that – ‘Trying not to have the confidence of I’m African...’

Kanukai: I know we’re gonna have moments where we shouldn’t have said something, but I’m really excited to be in Nigeria with all Black women, I’m not gonna lie –

Uzo: YEEESSSS!

Kanukai: That’s the biggest thing for me, just being grounded in knowing that I have all these amazing women with me that are gonna help me stay in myself so I can show up in a very respectful way... Some of the places we’re gonna go are very sacred, so how can we show up – not every Nigerian, not every Igbo person is allowed to be in those places, y’know. So, how do I show up without the ‘I’m African, I’m Zimbabwean, we’re cousins and I should be allowed to go in here because we’re doing research,’ y’know? That’s where I’m at.

Michael: Talk ‘bout complicated, but it has to be, right! I mean, I’ve never been and so I only have an *idea* of Africa, but there’s a truth that must hit you the minute you step off that plane, I imagine. There’s no way this trip can just be about dance or even about Igbo traditions, is all I’m trying to say... Going to Africa can’t just be about any one thing....

Kanukai: Yeah, but some things are just cultural, y’know? I don’t know if this happens in Nigeria, but elderly women [in Zimbabwe], they can literally, just randomly, come up and touch your boobs, if they like you...

(Everybody Laughing)

Kanukai: It’s nothing sexual, butThis has happened to me in Zimbabwe and Togo, and they were just checking to see if I’m okay.... y’know, babies.... (Everybody *REALLY* laughing!)

Nkeiruka: Hahahaha! The one thing I would say is that in Nigeria the respectability around women is really high, so I definitely have some anxiety around like – what’s the presentation about how we dress, what our

hair is gonna look like ‘cos I know that – this group, they will look at them and be like, ‘Oh, these are prostitutes,’ I just know it. The role of women in Nigeria is to present yourself in all these proscribed manners so you don’t get disrespected – class also plays into that, depending on where you are.... Here, like, you can be of any kinda class, you can look any kinda way, but obviously it’s worse and worse the darker you are. I mean, rich white men, obviously, can be whatever, but over there if you’re not presenting yourself as a “Madam,” people in the street feel they can treat you any kind of way.

Michael: Uzo, you wanna throw in a quick thought on this...?

The loss of loved ones is not just about people, they also take with them the questions that you can never ask, the mysteries that you can never solve.

– NKEIRUKA ORUCHE

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

Uzo: Well, it’s not gonna be quick, hahaha! But, like, if you wanna – in Nigeria it’s about classism, the more approximate you are to the colonizer the more social class you have –

Michael: Jesus....

Uzo: So, the way you speak, the way you supposedly dress, even if that’s not the way you are, it’s the respectability politics that gets you in the room, right...? It’s unfortunate, but if we had one white person on this trip it would change the whole game in a certain way. It would get you into doors that – and you’re like, Why! It’s because there’s a white person or a Chinese person in the group. So, we do have a privilege with our Americanness and so it’s like a double edged sword, AND, what side of the coin are we playing with?! So, as a woman, you add sexism to the classism... It doesn’t matter that I have Dr. Uzo Nwankpa in front of my name. If you don’t have MRS in front, you ain’t shit!

Nkeiruka: Marriage-ism!

Uzo: Yeah, marriage-ism! Hahahaha! I’m hella fuckin free when I’m outside Nigeria, but when I’m in Nigeria, that shit takes a hold of me.

Michael: Before we met today, I asked you to think about what attitudes or ways of thinking from America that you wanted to take with you, and which ones you wanted to leave behind...?

Ebonie: One thing I don’t want to take with me is that defense mechanism that Black Americans can have because we’ve been treated like shit. I feel like we automatically enter a space with this guard up, or like, in the beginning we’re trying to figure out who’s trying to play us, right! I mean, I’m gonna be on my toes, but I don’t wanna go in with that mindset.

Jameelah: Yeah, I wanna go with a mentality of service.

Nkeiruka: There are other realities, other wisdoms, and it’s so American to think that our way is the only way to function. I wanna leave that behind.

Roshonda: I wanna go and humble myself while I’m out there...

Michael: Man, I wasn’t expecting us to spend so much time outside the dance practice and Igbo traditions of the trip, but

I’m Soooo glad we did! The trip itself is about 2 months long, right, so what’s the day to day gonna look like?

Nkeiruka: We’re starting off in Lagos where we’re gonna meet the group that we’re collaborating with, doing the exchange with, [Ifeyi Akabueze and his Okachamma Dance Troupe](#). But pretty quickly we’re traveling south east to four rural states where Igbo people and culture are – it would be like, landing in California and traveling to Mississippi, Atlanta. The daily activities are still finding themselves, but they’ll include dance and music workshops with Igbo artists, visiting cultural and historical sites, cooking lessons, eating traditional foods, witnessing ceremonies and traditional rites –

Michael: Wow!

Nkeiruka: – and meeting with indigenous Igbo culture bearers, like crafts people, farmers, birthworkers, y’know..... We’ll start in Lagos and end there, and at the end we want to put on our own event, show our work and talk about this project...

Michael: Amazing! *Amazing!* You’re making me wanna go so I can document the whole thing, hahahaha! Okay, give me three dreams you have for yourself or the trip.....

Kanukai: I want to be able to complete the classes, not give up. Um, I want to capture pictures – I wanna be able to tell the story through photography, and I want to build connections with people that are beyond this short period of time that we’re there.

Ebonie:: Imma go find my husband and git RICH!! Hahahahaha! Naaaah!!!! To go to Africa is a dream, to go as an artist was always a dream, so it feels like I’m already doing that. Um, like Kanukai said, being with Black women, not only Black women, but Black women doing the work – I wanna be like, free! It’s pretty simple. I don’t feel like that here. I just want to focus on Ebonie for damn near two months without all the madness, and see what I’m capable of doing, whatever it is.....

Roshonda: Eat a lot and know how to cook food. Learn some Igbo and the third thing....? I have to think about that one.....

Uzo: This is already the dream... This, um, traveling home could have gone any which way, but it’s showing



up in this way and for that I’m so full of gratitude. I hope it’s a colorful, dynamic, full of life experience. I wanna soak it in, drink it in.... Be with it all and feel alive! I have visions of working with small groups of young people moving together, vibing together – music, dance, and play, which is what we do here anyway, but to be doing it in our ancestral land is like, WOOOOOH! I’m excited to make connections with healers that use music and dance.

Jameelah: One of the things I want to focus on is not to hold back. Sometimes I have exciting things come to me, but I find it hard to express that excitement. I dunno, I don’t want to hold back. Also, I really want to do a music project in 2023 and so I would love to connect with some creative folks that can help me do some stuff, and the third one is something around food.

Nkeiruka: That there’s a bond with this group where nothing disrupts the process of our connection. Attached to that, we open up a pathway for other people to have this connection. I want people to see the value of what we’re doing, that they can stand in the power and the pride of this culture, this practice, these works, to say – dancers and

musicians are seen as second class out there.... I hope this codifies me to stay the course, to not give up –

Roshonda: I’ve got the third one! I wanna learn how we teach these traditions to our children... yeah, that’s what I’m hoping....

Is the past ever truly behind us? Rarely. Alongside us? Usually. Ahead of us? Unconsciously. Above us? Quite possibly.

Nigeria, like much of Africa, is barely 60 years into its “independence.” It’s way too early to tell what it will become, but one thing’s for sure, there’s much to look forward to as long as we remember to remember, which, sadly, inevitably, is not as easy as it sounds. Says it all, doesn’t it.....

MICHAEL FRENCH is originally from London, England and has been a theatre director, writer, and theatre arts educator for over 20 years. He has written the Ovation award winning play ‘The Rainy Season,’ collaborated with Tiger Lion Arts on the much acclaimed ‘The Buddha Prince,’ a walking play about the life of the Dalai Lama, and directed plays in London, New York City, and the Bay Area of San Francisco. Michael is a resident director for Playground, a resident artist for Oakland Theatre Project, and the artist development coach and director of creative writing classes for Afro Urban Society. He is currently writing his first collection of short stories entitled ‘Babble.’

There are other realities, other wisdoms, and it's so American to think that our way is the only way to function. I wanna leave that behind.

– NKEIRUKA ORUCHE

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

4th to 5th Generation Flamenco & Spanish Dancer

Humbly carrying on a *Gitano* family flamenco legacy

BY TACHÍA FLAMENCO

I WAS 5 YEARS OLD and it was “show and tell” day at my elementary school. I remember that day vividly because I was so excited to bring a little flamenco dancer doll and tell the class about *mi mamá* Carolina Lugo, a professional flamenco dancer, and how I liked to dance flamenco with my *abuela* (grandmother) too. It feels like it is all coming full circle now. There have been so many memorable things that have happened since, from performing professionally together for the majority of my life,

to now, where *mi mamá* at a fairly young age (she is in her 60’s) is sick and unable to get out of bed.

Being the fifth generation flamenco and Spanish dancer in my family, this is the abridged version of our matriarchal familial story. We are Sephardic Jewish and *Gitano*, Spanish for Romani people, (we now say Romani people instead of the offensive “Gypsy” in English). As such, we were either killed or forced to leave Spain.



PHOTO BY ROMELIA PHOTO

So, my great-great-grandmother Domitila and her family moved to Mexico, along with a big black trunk of family heirlooms—marvelously sentimental things like an arrow-head, a glass eye, jewelry that my great-grandfather made, *mantoncillos* (shawls) and more – that we still have to this day. My family stayed in Mexico and incorporated family

members of Indigenous and African descent while continuing to carry on the traditions of flamenco and Spanish dance. My great-grandmother Romelia passed it on to my grandmother Dora. She then married my grandfather Miguel (from Spain) and moved to Arizona, and then to Southern California where my *mamá* Carolina was born.

A VERY QUICK LESSON about the roots of flamenco so you can understand where my family fits into this. The Rajasthani *Gitanos* started their journey in India, went through the Middle East and North Africa, and ended up in Southern Spain. Flamenco has influences from all of these cultures with its way of life, rhythms, movements, melodies and various

I have had the honor to learn, dance and perform with many remarkable flamenco artists and also take our family legacy back to the very place we were expelled from.



profundities that come from the soul and create *duende* (profound inspiration that comes on spontaneously). The sheer creation and expression of flamenco is profound in itself so a thorough understanding is required. *Gitanos* started flamenco as a way of expressing themselves within their communities. They weren't allowed to sing, play music or dance publicly for a long time due to extreme racism and discrimination. When my family left Spain, they brought these flamenco traditions with them, passed them down, and built on them, as flamenco has also progressed internationally since then. My mom and I have helped maintain our family's tradition. It could have been lost as a result of the *Gitano* and Jewish genocide that was still happening at the turn of the 20th century and beyond.

AS A KID, my *mamá* started dancing flamenco, ballet, modern and Spanish dance. She was the protégée of Gene Kelly and Lola Montes, as the two

also shared a dance studio. Spanish dance has three main aspects: classical (similar to ballet), regional (representing the various regions of Spain), contemporary (similar to American contemporary and modern dance). She was trained in all three. At the age of 14, my mom became the first professional flamenco and Spanish dancer in our family; she toured with Lola Montes, Antonio Triana, Luisa Triana, Rosa Montoya. My *mamá* and Miguel Santos (founder of Teatro Flamenco) sometimes danced together with Lola Montes as well. *Mamá* toured nationally and internationally and was offered a scholarship to the university of her dreams.

At the age of 17, she got in an almost fatal car accident and was in a coma for 10 days. She was told she would never walk again. She had reconstructive surgery on the right side of her head and body and they almost had to amputate her right arm. She played the castanets to help rehabilitate her arm which helped save it so it did not have to be amputated. Within one year, she was walking and soon after, she was dancing professionally again.

My *mamá* Carolina continued to dance and tour internationally with various flamenco and Spanish dance companies and as a soloist, even with her son, my older brother, who she brought with her everywhere. She then had my other brother and me, and took a little break from dance to help raise us. She wound up being a single mom for a while, helping our family through some horrific events (that I won't mention in order to

respect people's privacy). She is a marvelous example of a person who can overcome adversities and help others while continuing to live her dream. She is a hero. One of my upcoming projects is a concert season focused on honoring my mom's life's work. She was a castanet virtuoso and I bet that her arm-saving castanet rehabilitation had something to do with it. She had impeccable rhythm and played them so flawlessly that they sounded like water.

MY MAMÁ AND MY STEPDAD, Richard Tonkin, founded Carolina Lugo's Ballet Flamenco based in the San Francisco Bay Area when I was a kid. Growing up, along with dancing flamenco, I also danced ballet, modern and all forms of Spanish dance. I also kept getting nominated as the class clown so I decided to also become an actor and comedian. I turned professional in dance at age 14 with a different flamenco and Spanish dance company than my mom's because I wanted it to be clear that I stood on my own. I later joined my mom's company as the co-artistic director when I was 17. We have toured internationally together, performed in large theatres, with operas, symphonies and at intimate *tablao* shows (traditionally small flamenco shows done to show it up close, like you are in the living room with the artists). I have also performed as a soloist and choreographer with other dance and theatre companies, and still do. I am humbly carrying on the family legacy under the new name Tachiria Flamenco's Dance Music Theater. To honor our family's diverse ancestry, my new name "Tachiria" is Yaqui, an Indigenous tribe and language that has lands in México and Arizona, and means "light" like the light that we share, and "Flamenco" is honoring our matriarchal legacy.

Growing up I saw my *mamá* courageously resolve difficult situations,

and in some cases make exquisite art out of them. She would be creating choreographies non-stop, even at night. She'd knock on my door with excitement as she showed me a choreography that she had envisioned, then ask for my input. Our home was filled with art-making at all times of the day and night, with various artists from around the world staying with us.

When I was 18, I was invited to be the protégée of – to live with and take private lessons with – the legendary internationally renowned flamenco dancer, [Pepa Montes](#) in Sevilla, Spain. I have been going there every 2 to 3 years ever since. When I visit, I have the honor of spending time with another flamenco legend, [Cristina Hoyos](#), who threw me a private party at her home. I was absolutely honored beyond belief. I have had the honor to learn, dance and perform with many remarkable flamenco artists and also take our family legacy back to the very place we were expelled from. That has shed a light on and helped heal some years of familial traumas.

As for carrying on the family legacy, we are in the middle of a [fundraiser](#) to help the succession of the company so it can continue for many decades to come. Our Saturday flamenco *tablao* shows have opened up again after being closed for a while due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Check us out in San Francisco, shows at [Peña Pachamama Cultural Center](#) on Saturdays at 5:30pm and classes at [LINES Dance Center](#) on Sundays from 1-2:30pm, as well as our other shows and classes around the Bay Area and beyond. Flamenco celebrates beauty in all genders, ages and body types, so whether you want a hobby, a dance, music or voice class, a rehabilitation routine or to be a professional flamenco artist, there is space for you.

I AM CURRENTLY IN GRAD SCHOOL to help build more of an awareness about how this extremely diverse art form can bring communities together,

support childhood development, and foster rehabilitation for all ages. We can all connect to it, no matter where we are from. It is all part of this legacy: to nurture this generation, inspire future generations, and expand the perception of what flamenco is. While also being a professional artist in other genres, I respect the tradition while embracing innovation, continuing the legacy with clear intentions, an open mind, a pure love for and focus on flamenco and Spanish dance.

Looking back over our years of working together, *Mamá* and I created many choreographies and danced together until she literally could not stand or move her arms very well. That was just six months ago. We still do a little dance when I see her, along with a special song that we share. There is a quote about us that touches on our connection when dancing together: "It is when Lugo and her daughter dance together that the women unearth a new dimension in dance..." – Ann Murphy, *Oakland Tribune*. As I move forward to continue a new dimension of the company, *Mamá* will always be inspiring us in our hearts and *almas* (souls).

A BIPOC, LGBTQ+, two spirit artist, [MS. TACHIRIA FLAMENCO](#) (she/they) the iconic dancer and choreographer, has been named the "Top flamenco dancer in America" by the *So You Think You Can Dance* judges, is one of the featured professionals as "Living the Dream" and named a "Flamenco Star" by *Sunset Magazine*, and is an Isadora Duncan Dance Award elite nominee in individual performance. A survivor, now thriver, of rape, domestic violence and cancer, Ms. Flamenco is a flamenco & Spanish dancer, versatile Meisner actor, comedian, singer, artistic director, author. All have a specific focus on flamenco with a goal to help empower people to overcome perceived challenges so they can live their dreams now. She tours internationally throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, Canada and the Americas with a home base in San Francisco. Ms. Flamenco was one of the first originally chosen artists by Jennifer Lopez to be in "¡Que Viva! The Chosen." She is the artistic director of [Tachiria Flamenco's Dance Music Theater](#), and Tachiria Flamenco's A.R.T. (Artists Revolutionists Theorists).



PHOTO BY ROBERT HULIN

ADAPTING INSTEAD OF EXCLUDING

A CONVERSATION WITH NADIA
ADAME, AXIS DANCE COMPANY
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

BY NATALIA VELARDE



NATALIA VELARDE: All right, let's dive right into it. Tell me a little bit about yourself, what's your background?

NADIA ADAME: I come from Spain. As a child I studied classical ballet and flamenco at the Royal Conservatory of Dance and Drama in Madrid. At age 14, I had a car accident which left me with a spinal cord injury. The doctor said, "You can't do this anymore. You can't dance anymore. You have to find another career." But I thought, "This is what I love doing, why do I need to find something else?"

I decided to choreograph my own show. Yes! A full show at 18 years old. Most of the performers were non-disabled dancers, people I knew from the conservatory. That's when I started choreographing and producing my own work. We toured all over Spain. But Spain is one of those places where certain things need to move forward, and it was much more that way when I was younger. As a

disabled young person there was nowhere for me to go to continue studying dance. I felt like I couldn't grow, there was no role model for someone like me.

NV: Is that when you came to the US?

NA: Yes, I came to the US to study and improve my English. However, my main goal was to get a degree in dance, but the dance department at University of Colorado did not accept me because of my disability. I decided to apply for the theater department and they took me in.

It was a very good thing for me, I got to immerse myself in the world

of theater for 4 years. It gave me the opportunity to learn so much about acting, performing, and a lot of the technical aspects. But it also felt like a missed opportunity because I wasn't dancing full time. Some professors allowed me into their course so I was able to do some dancing.

After graduating, I reached out to about twenty dance companies because that's what I really wanted to do. Out of all those companies, only one replied, AXIS Dance Company. Judith Smith, AXIS artistic director at the time, wrote back asking if I could come to Oakland and audition for them.

NV: Ha!

NA: And that was it. That's how I started dancing for AXIS. It was amazing to me to see people in wheelchairs performing on stage. People like me! I had the opportunity to work with prominent choreographers such as Stephen Petronio, Bill T. Jones, and Sonya Delwaide. My entire world just opened up. It was possible. The dream I had been dreaming became real. It was a great experience.

After that I went to Spain because of family things. My grandfather was very sick and I wanted to spend his last months with him. So my partner,

who is a theater director, and I went back and we started a company there. We wanted to introduce this idea of integration; fully-abled performers as well as ones with disabilities together, on stage and engaged in artistic work. We did both theater and dance. We had the company for 10 years, but working in Spain was hard.

NV: What were some of the challenges you encountered running an integrated dance company in Spain?

NA: Finding funding was hard. We tried applying for government grants because the role of foundations is very different over there. Generally



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NADIA ADAME



speaking, money comes from the government, which is great but some issues come along with that.

NV: What do you mean?

NA: Well, because of my disability I was told to apply for Social Services and not to seek funds allocated for artistic endeavors. And I thought, “No, I don’t do social services. You can’t call me a therapist, that’s not what I do. I didn’t go to school for therapy. I don’t have their knowledge nor their training. I am an artist.” We always found a lot of walls and at that point in time we were not able to get past them. But I think now things are changing, at least that’s what I hear. That’s my story!

NV: As a dance/art maker, what is your intention? What do you hope your work conveys?

NA: A story. It might be my background in theater but I love telling stories, especially through movement. Sometimes these stories are abstract or not necessarily linear, but that’s what I want to convey to the audience. Also, I always talk to the dancers about bringing their stories to the rehearsals.

I don’t have to know their personal stories, but our personal experiences can stir feelings that I find are an essential part of the creative process.

NV: Being vulnerable and open.

NA: Yes, I want them to put all of that into the movement I’ve created. And then adapt it and translate it into their bodies, manipulating my movement through their personal experiences. I always ask my dancers to journal so they have a record of what they went through as we develop new work. My goal is to work together.

NV: Collaboration.

NA: I love collaboration. I love talking to different people and taking them on a journey and for them to do the same for me. Going down this road together and discovering new things that maybe need to surface. I love the creative process.

NV: Right. Sometimes it’s even more rewarding than the end product. As a dancer, that’s when I got to learn the most about my art.

NA: I agree, and sometimes it’s frustrating, too. What you’re trying to

get out doesn’t come out the way you want or the way you imagine. There can be some frustration but it’s beautiful.

NV: Do you have a particular process or methodology to create?

NA: A lot of people ask me that but I want to surprise myself every single day. I try not to be an artist with a formula who can’t deviate from it and who does the same thing all the time. I’ve seen a choreographer’s first piece and thought, “Wow that was amazing.” Then I’ll go see their next show and it’s very similar to the previ-

ous one. Then I’ll go to a third show where everything’s the same: the costume, the type of movement, the lighting, etc. It works for some people and that’s great for them. I admire that. However, I try to discover new things every time because I work with different people, I have new ideas, I’ve hired different dancers, and I want to challenge myself to create different types of movement as well.

NV: What do you look for in a dancer?

NA: Oh, great question. Very hard question. I look for dancers that are willing to throw themselves into the unknown. I look for passion and, you know, technique is always nice to have but it’s not the only thing. I would go for someone with great presence even if they might not have the best technique. Someone who can captivate me and the audience; when they are on stage you can’t help but to look at them. Yes, those are the three things I mostly look for in a dancer.

NV: What are some of the misconceptions people have about integrating dance and disability?

NA: Sometimes, people think it’s

going to look like a dance therapy session or think the choreography will be very simplistic. One dancer does this move to the right and then the other dancer does the same thing to the left. Another misconception is that work like mine needs to be *inspirational*. And inspirational is one of those words that make me think, “Am I inspiring you bevvvvvvsvcause I’m doing an amazing job or because I use a cane? If it’s because I have a cane then I don’t want to inspire you.” I want my work to be fulfilling artistically; to stand on its own; to make a statement and make the audience think. Also, the audience is not obligated to like my work just because I’m featuring performers with different abilities.

NV: So you feel like you’re still breaking boundaries?

NA: Yes, I do. Tell me, how many disabled choreographers are choreographing for mainstream companies? How many disabled dancers or actors are actually able to find meaningful work? How many dance companies are led by a disabled director? Around the world, barely any. And as we break boundaries, let’s remember it’s a team effort, it’s all of us. We all want to be recognized for what we do.

But the problem starts earlier. When a young disabled person seeks training in the performing arts, it’s extremely limited. I have spoken with many university dance programs who have received applications from disabled candidates who got rejected because they don’t have the tools to train dancers with different abilities. So, AXIS has developed a program to help dance instructors be more inclusive.

NV: That’s great! Can you tell me more about this program?

NA: We have a teacher training program, which is always part of our summer intensive. We’ve gone to a number of universities and introduced

our program. When we talk to professors we ask questions like, “What kind of language do you use? Is it inclusive language?” Somebody like me might not be able to take a ballet class and that’s why I couldn’t get my degree in dance. However, at that point I had seven years of classical ballet training at a conservatory level. Nobody took that into account.

How can you adapt a ballet class for somebody who comes in in a wheelchair? How can one teach and make people with a disability feel like they belong there? In the program, we talk a lot about language adaptation and translation of movement. If

I cannot do a rond de jambe with my leg, can I do it with my arms? Can I do it with my head or my torso? We talk about recognizing the purpose of an exercise and translating it into another body part.

I want to bring this program to many other universities and then start reaching below, with high schools perhaps. So if a teacher has somebody with a disability in their classroom, whatever that is, they now know they can adapt instead of exclude.

NV: So after living all over the world, performing for Candoco Dance Company in the UK, founding your own



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NAJIA ADAME

company and working in numerous independent projects, why come back to AXIS?

NA: Being asked back felt like I came full circle. First of all, it was an honor when I got asked to do a presentation for the board and then went through the interview process. This is where I started, where I found the support I needed and where I found people like me. It's where I feel I can change the world of dance and

disability and maybe I can change the field of dance. It feels like home.

NV: Where do you hope to take AXIS during your tenure as artistic director?

NA: One of the biggest goals I had when I joined as artistic director was to raise the salary of my dancers. I remember as a dancer, it was always a struggle and pay is usually low. As a dancer you come into the studio,


you have to be creative, you have to give your body, your brain and your soul to the work. And more often than not dancers have to find a second job or they have to teach to afford these expensive Bay Area prices. So, within the first month of 2022, I was able to increase the salary of the dancers by 30%, thanks to the Mellon Foundation. It was huge for us.

A big ambition of mine is to do a lot more international work. We have a huge project in Germany in September and I'm trying to put together a tour of Spain and Italy. I am hoping to solidify all of this in January.

And finally, I want to continue listening and giving back. Both previous artistic directors, Judith Smith and Mark Brew, had such a connection with our community. I want to continue and expand that legacy. Back when I was performing with AXIS, we taught many community classes for children. That was a huge thing for me. Provide young disabled people with the training they wanted and needed. That's where everything starts; finding disabled dancers is a struggle because of the lack of opportunities to train.

NADIA ADAME is a Spanish multidisciplinary award-winning disabled artist. She studied Ballet & Flamenco at the Royal Dance Conservatory of Madrid and has a BA in Theatre from the University of Colorado. She was a company member with AXIS (2001-2003) and Candoco Dance Company (2007-2008). In 2004, she co-founded and was the Co-Artistic Director of Compañía Y in Spain, a multimedia and performance collective. Nadia's credits include dance, theater, commercial, and independent film projects in the UK, Spain, US, and Canada. In 2022 she became the Artistic Director of AXIS Dance Company.

Born and raised in Bolivia, NATALIA VELARDE began her dance education at Summa - Artis Escuela de Ballet Clásico y Contemporáneo in the city of La Paz. She obtained her B.A. in Dance and Arts Administration from Goucher College. Natalia has performed with the Washington Ballet, Deep Vision Dance Company and The National Ballet Company, among others. As a freelancer and guest artist, she has performed in Philadelphia, New York, Virginia, La Paz, London, Marseille, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. She currently serves as faculty member at Pepperdine University, Westside School of Ballet and Debbie Allen Dance Academy.



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ADAPTAR EN VEZ DE EXCLUIR:

UNA CONVERSACIÓN CON NADIA ADAME, DIRECTORA ARTÍSTICA DE AXIS DANCE COMPANY

POR NATALIA VELARDE



NATALIA VELARDE: Muy bien, empecemos. Cuéntame un poco sobre ti, ¿cuál es tu formación?

NADIA ADAME: Vengo de España. De niña estudié Ballet Clásico y Flamenco en el Real Conservatorio Superior de Danza y Arte Dramático de Madrid. A los 14 años, tuve un accidente automovilístico que me dejó con una lesión en la médula espinal. El médico me dijo: “Ya no puedes hacer esto. Ya no puedes bailar. Debes encontrar otra carrera”. Pero yo pensé, esto es lo que amo hacer, ¿por qué necesito encontrar otra cosa?

Decidí crear mi propio espectáculo. ¡Sí! Todo un espectáculo a los 18 años. La mayoría de los artistas eran bailarines sin discapacidad, gente que conocía del conservatorio. Fue entonces cuando comencé a coreografiar y producir mi propio trabajo. Hicimos una gira por toda España. Pero España es uno de esos lugares donde todavía ciertas cosas tienen que avanzar y más aún cuando yo era joven. Como una

joven con discapacidad, no tenía a dónde ir para seguir estudiando danza. Sentí que no podría crecer, no había un modelo a seguir para alguien como yo.

NV: Is that when you came to the US?

NA: Sí, vine a los Estados Unidos para estudiar y mejorar mi inglés. Sin embargo, mi objetivo principal era obtener una licenciatura en danza, pero el departamento de danza de la Universidad de Colorado me rechazó debido a mi discapacidad. Apliqué para el departamento de teatro y me aceptaron.

Fue una experiencia muy buena, pude sumergirme en el mundo del

teatro durante 4 años. Me dio la oportunidad de aprender mucho sobre actuación, interpretación y muchos aspectos técnicos. Pero también sentí que fue una oportunidad perdida porque no podía dedicarme a la danza a tiempo completo. Algunos profesores me permitieron entrar a sus cursos, así que pude bailar un poco.

Después de graduarme, contacté a unas veinte compañías de danza porque eso era lo que realmente quería hacer. De todas esas compañías, solo una respondió, Axis Dance Company. Judith Smith, directora artística de Axis en ese momento, respondió

preguntándome si podía ir a Oakland y audicionar para ellos.

NV: ¡HíJala!

NA: Y así fue como empecé a bailar para Axis. Para mí fue increíble ver a personas en sillas de ruedas actuando en el escenario. ¡Gente como yo! Tuve la oportunidad de trabajar con destacados coreógrafos como Stephen Petronio, Bill T. Jones y Sonya Delwaide. Mi mundo se abrió, el sueño que había soñado se hizo realidad. Fue una gran experiencia.

Después volví a España por cosas de familia. Mi abuelo estaba muy

enfermo y quería pasar sus últimos meses de vida con él. Así que mi pareja, que es director de teatro, y yo regresamos y empezamos una compañía allí. Queríamos dar a conocer esta idea de integración; artistas con y sin discapacidades juntos en el escenario. Hicimos tanto teatro como danza. Dirigimos esta compañía durante 10 años, pero llevar a cabo nuestros planes en España fue duro.

NV: ¿Cuáles fueron algunos de los desafíos que encontraste al dirigir una compañía de danza integrada en España?



FOTOS CORTESÍA DE NADIA ADAME



NA: Encontrar financiación fue difícil, buscamos subvenciones del gobierno, porque allí el papel de las fundaciones es muy diferente, pero no se dio. En términos generales, el dinero proviene del gobierno, lo cual es excelente, pero a veces resulta problemático.

NV: ¿Qué quieres decir?

NA: Bueno, debido a mi discapacidad me dijeron que solicitara Servicios Sociales y que no buscará fondos asignados para actividades artísticas. Y pensé: “No, yo no hago servicios sociales. No puedes referirte a mí como terapeuta, yo no estudié terapia, no tengo su conocimiento ni su capacitación. Yo soy una artista.” Siempre encontramos muchas puertas cerradas y en ese momento no pudimos abrirlas, pero creo que ahora las cosas están cambiando, al menos eso es lo que escucho. ¡Esa es mi historia!

NV: Como creadora de danza/arte, ¿cuál es tu propósito? ¿Qué esperas que tu trabajo comunique?

NA: Una historia. Puede que sea mi experiencia en el teatro, pero me encanta contar historias, especialmente a través del movimiento. A veces estas historias son abstractas o no necesariamente lineales, pero eso es lo que quiero transmitir al público. Cuando hablo con los bailarines les pido traer todas sus experiencias personales a los ensayos. Yo no tengo no necesito estar al tanto de sus vivencias, pero como artistas nuestras experiencias sacan a la luz sentimientos que creo que son parte esencial del proceso creativo.

NV: Mantenerse abierto y vulnerable.

NA: Sí, quiero que pongan todo eso en el movimiento que he creado, que lo adapten y lo interpreten con el cuerpo, que manipulen mi movimiento a través de sus experiencias

personales. Siempre pido a mis bailarines que escriban en un diario para que cuenten con un registro de sus impresiones a medida que desarrollamos una nueva coreografía. Mi objetivo es que trabajemos juntos.

NV: Si, colaborar es muy satisfactorio.

NA: ¡Me encanta colaborar. Me gusta mucho hablar con personas distintas, invitarlos a mi mundo, llevarlos de viaje y que ellos hagan lo mismo conmigo. Al recorrer este camino juntos, tenemos la oportunidad de descubrir cosas nuevas que probablemente necesitan salir a la luz. Amo el proceso creativo.

NV: Te entiendo, a veces es incluso más gratificante que el producto final. Como bailarina fue cuando más aprendí sobre mi arte.

NA: Estoy de acuerdo y, a veces, también es frustrante. Lo que estás tratando de sacar no sale como quieres

FOTOS CORTESÍA DE NADIA ADAME

o como lo imaginabas. Puede haber algo de frustración, pero es hermoso..

NV: ¿Tienes algún proceso o metodología en particular para crear?

NA: Mucha gente me ha preguntado eso, pero yo intento sorprenderme todos los días. Trato de no ser un artista con una fórmula, alguien que no puede desviarse de ella y hace lo mismo todo el tiempo. Me ha pasado, he visto la primera pieza de un coreógrafo y pensé "guau, increíble". Luego fui a ver su siguiente espectáculo y resultó muy similar al anterior. Después fui al tercer show y todo es igual; el vestuario, el tipo de movimiento, la iluminación, etc. Para algunos este sistema funciona y les viene bien, lo admiro. Sin embargo, yo trato de descubrir cosas nuevas cada vez porque trabajo con gente distinta, tengo nuevas ideas, he contratado a bailarines nuevos y porque busco el desafío de crear diferentes tipos de movimiento.

NV: ¿Qué buscas en un/una bailarín/a?

NA: Oh, buena pregunta y muy difícil. Busco bailarines que estén dispuestos a lanzarse a lo desconocido. Busco a alguien con pasión y si, tener buena técnica siempre ayuda pero no es lo único. Yo me inclinaría más por alguien con mucha presencia aunque no tenga la mejor técnica. Alguien que logre cautivarme y cautivar al público. Un bailarín que cuando esté en el escenario no puedas dejar de mirarlo. Sí, esas son las tres cosas que más busco en un bailarín.

NV: ¿Cuáles son algunos de los conceptos erróneos que tiene la gente sobre la integración de danza y discapacidad?

NA: Muchas veces la gente piensa que parecerá una sesión de terapia de baile o que mi coreografía será muy sencilla. Un bailarín hace este

movimiento hacia la derecha y luego el otro hace lo mismo hacia la izquierda. Otro concepto erróneo es que un trabajo como el mío necesita ser *inspirador*. E inspirador es una de esas palabras que me hacen pensar, ¿te inspiro porque estoy haciendo un trabajo excelente o porque uso un bastón?

Si es porque tengo un bastón entonces no quiero inspirarte. Quiero que mi trabajo sea gratificante y estimulante artísticamente, que valga por mérito propio y que haga pensar al público. Además, uno no está

obligado a gustar de lo hago solo porque presentó artistas con diferentes habilidades.

NV: ¿Entonces sientes que todavía estás rompiendo barreras?

NA: Sí. Dime, ¿cuántos coreógrafos discapacitados han sido contratados por compañías tradicionales? ¿Cuántos bailarines o actores discapacitados son realmente capaces de encontrar trabajo relevante en su medio? ¿Cuántas compañías de danza están dirigidas por un director discapacitado? Alrededor del mundo, tal vez alguno.



Y a medida que superamos los límites, recordemos que es un esfuerzo de equipo. Cada uno de nosotros quiere ser reconocido por lo que hace.

Pero el problema empieza antes, la formación en las artes escénicas es muy limitada para un joven discapacitado. He hablado con muchos programas universitarios de danza que han recibido solicitudes de candidatos discapacitados que fueron rechazados, porque estas instituciones no tienen las herramientas para formar bailarines con diferentes habilidades. Por eso, Axis ha desarrollado un programa para ayudar a los profesores de baile a ser más inclusivos.

NV: ¡Genial! ¿Nos puedes hablar más sobre este programa?

NA: Tenemos un programa de formación para maestros, que siempre es parte de nuestro curso intensivo de verano. Visitamos varias universidades y cuando hablamos con los docentes preguntamos: “¿Qué tipo de lenguaje usas? ¿Es un lenguaje inclusivo?”.

Alguien como yo no puede pasar una clase de Ballet tradicional y es por eso no pude obtener mi licenciatura en danza. Sin embargo, yo contaba con siete años de estudio de Ballet Clásico de alto nivel, estudie en un conservatorio, nadie tuvo eso en cuenta.

¿Cómo puede adaptarse una clase de ballet para alguien que viene en silla de ruedas? ¿Cómo puede uno enseñar y al mismo tiempo hacer que una persona discapacitada sienta que pertenece allí? Durante nuestro programa, hablamos mucho sobre la adaptación del lenguaje y la traducción del movimiento. Si no puedo hacer un rond de jambe con la pierna, ¿puedo hacerlo con los brazos? ¿Puedo hacerlo con la cabeza o con el torso? Hablamos de reconocer el objetivo de un ejercicio y traducirlo a otra parte del cuerpo.

Quiero llevar este programa a muchas otras universidades y tal vez

después extenderlo a escuelas secundarias. Entonces, si un maestro tiene a alguien con una discapacidad en su salón, sea lo que fuere, ahora sabe que puede adaptar en lugar de excluir.

NV: Entonces, después de vivir por todo el mundo, bailar para Candoco Dance Company en el Reino Unido, fundar tu propia compañía y trabajar en numerosos proyectos independientes, ¿por qué volver a Axis?

NA: Cuando me preguntaron si quería regresar sentí que había completado un círculo. Primero, fue un honor presentar mis ideas y poder hablar con la junta directiva de Axis y luego pasé por el proceso de entrevista. Es aquí donde empecé, donde encontré gente como yo y el apoyo que necesitaba. Es donde siento que puedo cambiar la relación entre la danza y la discapacidad y tal vez pueda cambiar el campo de la Danza. Me siento como en casa.

NV: ¿Hacia dónde esperas llevar a Axis durante tu gestión como directora artística?

NA: Cuando me integré como directora artística, uno de los objetivos más grandes era aumentar el salario de mis bailarines. Recuerdo que como bailarina, siempre fue una lucha porque la paga suele ser baja. Cuando los bailarines llegan al estudio, tienen que ser creativos, tienen que entregar su cuerpo, su cerebro y su alma a este arte. La mayoría de las veces, deben encontrar un segundo trabajo o tienen que dar clases para pagar los altos precios del Área de la Bahía de San Francisco. Entonces, durante el primer mes del 2022, pude aumentarles el salario en un 30%, gracias a [Mellon Foundation](#). Fue algo muy grande para nosotros.

Otra gran ambición mía es llevar nuestro trabajo al extranjero.

Tenemos un gran proyecto en Alemania en septiembre y estoy tratando de organizar una gira por España e Italia. Espero solidificar todo esto en enero.

Y finalmente, quiero fortalecer el lazo que Axis tiene con toda la gente que nos apoya, escucharlos y seguir aportando. Ambos directores artísticos anteriores, Judith Smith y Mark Brew, tenían una conexión muy fuerte con nuestra comunidad; quiero continuar y expandir ese legado. Encontrar bailarines discapacitados es muy difícil debido a la falta de oportunidades para formarse en este ámbito. Antes, cuando bailaba con Axis, ofrecíamos muchas clases comunitarias para niños. Eso fue algo enorme para mí. Quiero abrir las puertas a los jóvenes discapacitados y proveer las oportunidades de formación que desean y necesitan; es ahí donde todo comienza.

NADIA ADAME es una artista multidisciplinaria española, discapacitada y galaronada. Estudió Ballet y Flamenco en el Real Conservatorio de Danza de Madrid y obtuvo su Licenciatura en Teatro en la Universidad de Colorado. Fue miembro de la compañía AXIS (2001–2003) y Candoco Dance Company (2007–2008). En 2004 cofundó y fue codirectora artística de la Compañía Y en España, un colectivo multimedia y de performance. Los créditos de Nadia incluyen proyectos de danza, teatro, comerciales y cine independiente en el Reino Unido, España, Estados Unidos y Canadá. En 2022 aceptó la dirección artística de AXIS Dance Company.

Nacida en Bolivia, **NATALIA VELARDE** comenzó su educación en danza en Summa – Artís Escuela de Ballet Clásico y Contemporáneo en la ciudad de La Paz. Obtuvo su licenciatura en Danza y Administración de las Artes en Goucher College. Natalia ha bailado con el Washington Ballet, Deep Vision Dance Company y The National Ballet Company, entre otros. Como artista independiente y artista invitada, se ha presentado en Filadelfia, Nueva York, Virginia, La Paz, Londres, Marsella, San Francisco y Los Ángeles. Actualmente se desempeña como miembro de facultad en la Universidad de Pepperdine, Westside School of Ballet y Debbie Allen Dance Academy.

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CRIP ECSTASY CENTERS ACCESSIBILITY IN NIGHTLIFE

BY OCTAVIA ROSE HINGLE

THERE IS A SENSE of belonging felt deep in my bones that only the dance of a nightclub can bring. As the bass thunders its hypnotic hymn and sweat drips down my gyrating chest, boundaries between myself and the bodies around me begin to disappear. We vibrate as cells in the same large organism; sacks of fluid swimming in a sea of plasma. The pleasure we feel fulfills our deepest human instincts – it digs into a primal reverence towards a higher power, a loss of self in the pursuit of something greater. We leave our social inhibitions behind and for a moment we pulse with collective purpose.

Nightlife has always ignited me with its luscious, alchemical energy. But seven years ago, I began to experience chronic pain and mobility loss in my ankles and feet that made it harder and harder to access these spaces where I thrived. If I wanted to go to a party, I had to scope out seating that was hard to find, or bring a mobility device of my own that wound up crammed into the corner of a crowded dance floor. Once I did find a place to sit, it was often set far away from where my non-disabled friends wanted to dance, which could feel isolating and awkward. Some venues required mile-long walks through uneven terrain to access, or multiple flights of stairs that weren't advertised in event descriptions. I often found myself needing to leave parties early because I was in too much discomfort, or I simply stayed home and avoided them all together.



PHOTO BY GUERRILLA DAVIS

I knew I wasn't the only one who had these experiences, and I started connecting with others who felt similarly. For some, strobe lights and dry ice fog could cause seizures or sensory processing overload. For others, there wasn't a space at parties to unwind and de-stress when faced with too much stimulation and loud noise. And as the Covid pandemic took hold, access barriers became more and more prevalent for friends who couldn't risk attending tightly packed, unmasked in-person events.

Through all of this, I began to see the gaps in the structure of a world that prides itself on welcoming difference, but fails to make space for so many in its universe. Truthfully, I might not have considered these issues myself if I hadn't begun to have my own experience with physical impairment – which showed me just how important it is for a cultural shift in nightlife to take place. How, I wondered, can queer clubs be more welcoming to the disability community? How can disability culture take the lead in re-imagining these spaces?

As I began to ask these questions, I learned about disabled artists across the world who were conjuring their own accessible nightlife magic. In Toronto, [Crip Rave Collective](#) was throwing parties that started early in the evening with comfy seating, heated blankets, and an anti-inflammatory hydration station. In New York City, events organized by artists including [Jerron Herman](#) and [Kevin Gotkin](#) included ASL interpretation and SUBPAC wearable music technology for D/deaf patrons, as well as Audio Description for blind and low-vision patrons. In the Bay Area, the drag festival [Oaklash](#) recently launched a Disability Grant fund for chronically ill and disabled queer performance makers. And throughout the pandemic, the [Remote Access collective](#) has hosted events that harness the power of the virtual realm as a space for disabled joy, pleasure activism and [access intimacy](#).

Inspired by these organizers and my own research into nightlife choreography, I began to dream up *Crip Ecstasy: An immersive nightlife experience that centers accessibility from the ground up*. How could I produce a party where I and others like me could feel comfortable, safe and cared for? Instead of accommodations being made for us, how could we create an environment that is truly designed for our needs, dreams and desires?

Planned for Saturday, June 3rd, 2023 at CounterPulse in San Francisco, *Crip Ecstasy* aims to work with a cast of disabled performance artists, DJs, ASL Interpreters and Audio Describers to conjure new blueprints for what a club space can be.

NIGHTLIFE CULTURE has always held an important place in the queer social world — from the gender experimentation of 19th century masquerade balls, to the invention of techno and house music in Black, gay communities of 1980s Detroit and Chicago, to the thriving international rave scenes of today. Throughout history and in the present moment, nightclubs and bars are often the only spaces that exist specifically for gay, lesbian, trans and queer folks in many communities. As spaces to dress up, dance, hook up and meet new people, nightclubs offer pleasure, release and connection in a world that so often tries to deny queer people this right. In their messy, hedonistic and imperfect way, they serve as a lifeline for people who otherwise have nowhere to be their authentic selves.

In my own experience, nightlife was the first place I felt fully embodied as a gay and gender-expansive person; one of the

A space can be beautiful, provocative and intriguing, but for whom and how?

first cultural spaces where I felt like I had something to contribute. In the rural Vermont town where I went to college, friends and I organized parties and performances where we could let go of the conservative culture around us and find new pathways towards self-reinvention. For one project, I threw a house party and then began a

spontaneous performance of high-camp drag in the middle of the dance floor. For another, I produced a nightlife installation that prophesied networks of apocalyptic survival in an underground world of biological mutation. At the end of the choreographed presentation, audience members were invited on stage for a series of high-energy aerobic exercises that devolved into a club night of euphoric abandon.

When I graduated and returned to my hometown in the Bay Area, I was welcomed into a thriving underground world of raves under freeways and in vacated buildings that



surpassed my wildest fantasies of what parties could be. I wanted to contribute to this landscape and produce more events that drew on my previous creative endeavors. But as my physical impairment became more complex, I had to back out from participating in all the ways I wanted.

With *Crip Ecstasy*, I look forward to returning to nightlife on my own terms, in a way that is more approachable for myself and my community. I imagine that when audience members enter this production, they are greeted with diverse ways to engage with the space that cater to many different desires and needs. In the main theater, music from a live DJ is simultaneously live-described on projectors for the D/deaf community. For those like myself who have difficulty standing or sitting for long periods of time, day beds and lounge chairs are placed around and in the center of the venue – instead of just being isolated to the outskirts. Here folks can lounge, lie down or dance on a horizontal plane and still be able to remain present and immersed in the fabric of the event.

Access benefits everyone. While these seating elements are prioritized for those who need them, all are welcome to experience the club from this unique vantage point.

Access benefits everyone.

I envision multiple performances by disabled dancers, drag queens and kings happening in between DJ sets.

This group of artists, (still to be finalized), are invited to translate elements of nightlife performance through the distinct knowledge base of their individual bodyminds. Together, we can activate the space and seating arrangements with a tapestry of perspectives, reflecting the infinite sources of wisdom the community holds. An audio describer can translate movement into spoken word, while ASL interpreters sign dialogue and lyrics. If audience members need to unwind or lie down in a quieter, welcoming environment, a chill-out space with cushion sculptures, calm lighting and

stim toys is installed in the lower level of the building. And through it all, access doulas – folks appointed to check in with guests and make sure their needs are being met – roam the crowd.

CREATING ACCESS is a continuous practice of learning, and I imagine there are things my collaborators and I might overlook in the process. There may be factors that we don't have room for in our budget, or considerations we don't initially include in our planning. While we might not get everything right, it feels important to prioritize accessibility first and foremost for what it is: a means of making all aspects of the event available for all who wish to participate. Secondary to this are the aesthetic embellishments that come within a creative process. A space can be beautiful, provocative and intriguing, but for whom and how? When artistic and access elements conflict with one another, it's important to stay grounded in this understanding.

Furthermore, our goal is to build a container that holds the trust and flexibility necessary to make adaptations and respond to audience requests as they arise. This becomes a choreography in and of itself – a network of care that reflects the larger intention of this event and the kind of world it wishes to reflect:

A world that takes the burden off disabled people to always state our needs first.

A world that builds solidarity, compassion and mutual understanding between people with different kinds of disabilities.

A world where access is our collective responsibility; a spell that we cast again and again to strengthen the connection to our shared humanity.

I look forward to diving deeper into these questions and research in the coming six months, finding new queries, collaborators and insights along the way. Whether you identify as disabled or not, all are invited to participate. I hope you'll join us on the dance floor! Through the power of a booming bass or a soothing chill-out space, a reclined seat or poetic performance description, may we all tap into the unique embodied joy a club can offer – and rediscover parts of our queerest, freakiest and most interconnected selves in the process.

OCTAVIA ROSE HINGLE is Bay Area born & raised choreographer and storyteller with a physical impairment. Their performance work centers access as an aesthetic portal to visions of past and future ancestors that travel through the present moment. Under the creative umbrella of Octavia Rose Projects, they facilitate collaborations with artists across movement, sound, video, text and visual design that tap into the transformative powers of our collective imagination. Octavia holds a BA in dance from Middlebury College, and has studied with ODC/Dance, AXIS Dance Company Choreo-Lab and the UCLA Dancing Disability lab and the Headlong Performance Institute. Performances and commissions include work with LEVYsalon, the SAFEhouse for the Arts RAW residency, the Shawl-Anderson Queering Dance Festival & the National Queer Arts Festival.

PHOTO BY TAKEOVER TOKYO

A DOOR
A PORTAL
A PLACE

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JANUARY 21–28 2023
MARCH 4–19 2023

PERFORMANCE,
PRACTICE, EXCHANGE,
EXPERIMENT, PARTY,
PLEASURE, PLAY

FRESHFESTIVAL.ORG

OMG

SPILL THE TEA KHFRESH 2023

A conversation between **ainsley elizabeth tharp** and **gizeh muñoz venghel**, current curators for KHFRESH 2023–2024 and eternal fans of **Kathleen Hermesdorf**.

This is an intimate, casual conversation that happened over Zoom between two best friends with deep reflections on their experience with **FRESH FESTIVAL** past, present, and future...

gizeh muñoz venghel: I remember hearing about Kathleen when I was a dance student in Mexico, back in 2017. When I first visited the Bay I tried to take her class because everyone was like, “You gotta take her class,” but she wasn’t around that summer. (boo:())

Luckily, I came back to the Bay a year later and met her. My first FRESH was 2018 and it literally changed my relationship to dance and performance, like life changing!!!

How about you? How did you first hear about FRESH?

ainsley elizabeth tharp: So, after college I was au pairing in Berlin circa 2017. A friend invited me to this FAKE Company show which was Kathleen’s company, it was at the ex-Australian embassy. At the time I remember thinking, “Huh, this sounds cool,” very punk rock, you know?

So, I am at this show, and it was like nothing I’ve ever seen before, like seriously my mind was fuck-ing blown.

(((BLOWN__ away, into little tiny pieces of WOWIE!!!! woah))) I remember being like, who the eff is this person, what are they doing, and how can I do that?!? It was at this FAKE Company show I met the late great Kathleen Hermesdorf and she

told me about FRESH and she said: “You should come!” And well... I did.

g: Yah! were we newbies at FRESH the same year?!? I think it was 2018.

a: Yes Yes! It was 2018... awhh little baby us<3

g: Aww yah, FRESH 2018 was my favorite so far, I think.

a: Same because I met you. (gizeh and ainsley staring longingly at each other through the Zoom screen). Do you have a favorite FRESH memory?

g: I think FRESH was this meeting point and Kathleen was for sure a friendship godmother. Honestly, I met my most dearest friends there.<3 There are so many good memories

and moments that literally changed my life: Kathleen and Albert’s class, OMG EPIC, there will never be a class like that, ((EVER)) I’m dead serious, by far the most empowering class I’ve ever taken. Performing at FRESH was also such a great opportunity, memory, and milestone in my career. You know, Kathleen and Albert were some of the first people that expressed how much they believed in me as an artist. I truly think that if it wasn’t for them, my path would have been soooooooooo different!

Another memory was when I was working with Kathleen in an arts admin capacity, I loved going to her house and just chatting, hanging out, and getting to know each other. We had some intimate and vulnerable moments together. It’s the last FRESH with KK (Kathleen) that I will never forget.</3 How about you?

a: Well first, OH EMM GEE Kathleen’s dance class was a straight up party at 10am. Like she had this superpower of making you feel like you were the most perfect, beautiful amazing body at that exact moment, like nothing needed to change, you are showing up the way that you are showing up, and that is a gift to this earth. I feel like her other superpower was bringing community together. Reflecting on what you said, all of my closest, dearest forever babes come out of this experimental FRESH community and, honestly, that is the reason why I stayed in the Bay. All these people swirled me into their lives and I was woven into the fabric of sweet, sweet experimental dance community of the Bay Area. Kathleen’s class, Kathleen’s FRESH space became such a hub for that magic to happen.



PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY



One more memory..Last year I was rehearsing for a Solo by Sara Shelton Mann for FRESH 22. It was the first year FRESH was coming back after Kathleen's death; everything had to be moved online because of Covid, like such a mess. Abby Crain, last year's beautiful FRESH Director came in to watch a draft of the piece. And when the piece was over Abby said with tears, "Oh my god, you dance so much like her." And this was such a tender moment. Sara, Abby, and I cried cathartically and felt so deeply into the influence Kathleen has in each of us throughout different generations and periods in her life. Awwhh my heart aches for that sweet tenderness.

g: What does FRESH mean to you?

a: I feel like FRESH for me hmmm.... FRESH for me is this container of innovation and failure, it is this thing that is like: --->lets try something so incredibly new, exciting, and terrifying. Maybe this really is not going to work out, maybe we fail (and fail hard), but there's this generous beautiful space that is holding us ever so softly when we fall. FRESH for me really is this experiment around community and sustainability. I think what is so beautiful is that we find ourselves asking these questions: where do we want to go in the field (of experimental

dance)((dance,dance,dance))? And how does what we do impact larger social spaces? And what are our practices around organizing, coming together, being held, and being heard? And, and, and... AND, that is creating, dismantling, reconstructing, trying again, and again, and again to build new spaces outside of late stage capitalism. That for me upholds this Festival as an agent of social change... whatever that means. What about you bb?

g: FRESH is a portal of magic, it is gathering and collectivity. It is a joy, and celebration, it is a ceremony, a playground of opportunity, and revolution. Kathleen had a vision that I truly admire and I am inspired by constantly.

What are you looking forward to; where is FRESH heading now?

a: We are arriving into a space that is so complex. We are arriving as people that have shifted, changed, evolved, transformed, burnt to the ground, and have been born again. We are resurrecting a space that will never be the same after Covid, after pandemic, after Kathleen's death, after BLM uprisings. We are working to honor Kathleen's legacy and the ancestral dance lineage of the Bay Area. I look forward to learning as we continue to change and think outside of a box that has been so generously held wide open for us.

So
 ""
 I am curious in the ways that we can continue to play with structure, how we can embody more inclusive multi-cultural anti-racist practices, how we can move towards equity, not only esthetically or what we write grants about, but like truly work towards upholding a space where everyone can receive what they need and thrive in that.

Kathleen's legacy touches so many people in so many places around the world. And that is being reflected by

who we are trying to bring into the space, who we are trying to create conversations with, and who is on this line-up.. (hush, hush coming soon)

g: I think FRESH has become a really important part of the dance history in the Bay Area. Kathleen impacted so many people all over the world through her art, and FRESH is now her legacy. I've had the honor to participate in FRESH as a student, performer, organizer, curator and soon-to-be teacher. Although I am relatively new to FRESH, I've had the opportunity to see how it has grown and developed throughout the years. I think KHFRESH is now heading towards a more horizontally and collaborative organizational dynamic, with the aim of building more fair and sustainable working structures.<<< so important!!

This is really exciting for me, because we can feel the spirit you were talking about, not only in the result, but in the process of creating it. I believe KHFRESH will belong from now on to the present and future dance communities. There are so many brilliant minds behind this year's festival, people that have been part of FRESH history for a long time, and new people that bring that innovative spark to the mix. We are taking risks, we are dreaming, we are trying really hard and I am really excited for what is coming.

ains, could you give us some insight and spill the tea of KHFRESH 2023!!!!

a: ooohhhh eeeemmm ggggggeeee. I feel honored.

So, you heard it here first folx: There will be glitter, there will be birthday cake, there will be some super cute dance parties, an amazing line-up of teachers and innovative makers. KHFRESH FESTIVAL will be hosted here in San Francisco, one week in January, 2 weeks in March 2023.

((a two parter!!!))
 January, we will open with Kathleen's Birthday party fundraiser

extravaganza--please come and donate! Cake, did I mention there will be cake!

We are conjuring up exchanges, experiments, a line-up that screams Kathleen Hermesdorf FRESH FESTIVAL!!!!!! We have Abby Crain, Keith Hennessy, and you gizeh teaching classes in jan!

<3
 [tea spilt.]

This line-up honors Kathleen's curatorial vision and that is what January KHFRESH is really about.

Then, buckle up baby cakes, because we have March!

Wow--ie...

MARCH is going to be January's H_O_T part 2 queer gen z sister?..?..?

So, the hot gossip is:

Basically, March is throwing everything out the window, taking out the trash, dusting those pesky cobwebs in the corner and being like: "Ok, who do we want to learn from? Who's class gives us tingly somatic pop rocks?"

This March iteration will be a little saucier, a little more, "Hmmm let's switch things up!" Maybe we invite people that have never been to KHFRESH before? Let's have some conversations that are raw and biting. What if we train really effing hard and also do some fun wacky experimental performative out of the box, out of body, in-body playtime? (ainsley sighhhs...) I can't wait.

g: yesss! Check out the website for more info about dates, schedule and all <https://freshfestival.org/>

this has been fun.. Ok last last question:

How has Kathleen and FRESH impacted your artistic career?

a: mmmm... I just want to take a deep breath of gratitude. I feel Kathleen so deeply in my bones. I feel so grateful that I got to train with her for so long and perform with her in different capacities. I celebrate being a part of this legacy in so many ways.

I feel her influence in the performance that I make, the class that I teach, and the space that I hold. Even the space that you and I are starting to create: an experimental class series outside of institutional barriers, a space without a pay wall, a space with the intention of paying teachers well, that all feels like a part of Kathleen's family tree.

g: I resonate with everything you said, Kathleen is a big dancestor for this generation. FRESH has been a door, a portal, a place where things are possible. Where new ideas come together. It has fed my inspiration and taught me that things can be different. That it is okay to be different. It helped me realize that art is more than what I thought it was. FRESH was a party and celebration of performance and dance. I keep those moments in my heart all the time, and I go back to those moments to remember who I am, who I was and why I do what I do now. Kathleen has influenced the way I work enormously. I will always admire how generous and how intentional she was in making this happen. She was a powerful human and her energy was unique on and off the stage.

a: I just want to reflect on what you said: "FRESH is a door, a portal, a place," I love it.

KH FRESH FESTIVAL part 1: January 21 – 27 part 2: March 3 – 19

ainsley elizabeth tharp is a Bay Area (Ohlone land) based alchemist+artist+activist.

gizeh muñiz vengal is a Mexicana artist who is also based in Bay Area (Ohlone land).

The Kathleen Hermesdorf Fresh Festival (KHFRESH) is a dynamic, annual platform for experimental dance, music and performance in Yelamu, Ramaytush Ohlone territory (San Francisco, CA) FRESH was founded in 2009 by **KATHLEEN HERMESDORF** (1967-2020) in collaboration with Albert Mathias. In the wake of Kathleen's recent and unexpected passing, a team of longtime FRESH fans and collaborators have stepped up to honor the festival's legacy and lead it into the future.

ARTISTS in EXILE

LATINA IMMIGRANTS' STORIES THROUGH FLAMENCO

by ANGELA ARTERITANO



PHOTOS (LEFT) BY KYLE ADLER, (ABOVE) PHOTO BY FLEETING FOX PHOTOGRAPHY

AFTER REACHING ALMOST FIFTEEN YEARS in exile and noticing the increasing number of fellow Venezuelan immigrants across the US and the world, I pondered the question of how to encapsulate a displaced legacy. An emergent legacy. A relationship to flamenco that is inclusive of our unique perspectives as Latinas in exile. *Markme* is the resulting multidisciplinary project. Within a contemporary flamenco setting, *Markme* aims to bring attention to the rediscovery of the Latina identity through a network of performative experiences.

THE INSTALLATION

The project began with the installation *Threaded Conversations*, a fiber art installation built with individual cotton fibers knotted into wooden dowels. Each thread was measured, cut and knotted while I had conversations with migrant women across the US. It started as a very simple task in my creative process, to have conversations about tradition with women while cutting these threads. I wanted to begin building body memory, so I could later recall these experiences while activating the installation with performance. Little did I know that it would become this charged conceptual work about community and tradition.

The design itself emerged from a deconstruction of the *Manton de Manila*, an embroidered silk shawl made traditionally by artisans in Spain, used as a dance element by flamenco dancers. Thousands of single knots create beautiful floral designs and the ends are always surrounded by fringe created from the same threads.

I departed from the idea of “the clean slate” to create a curtain-like fiber installation derived from the concept of stripping this traditionally charged flamenco element of all its meaning. The same way a blank canvas is to a painting, this became an opportunity for us to reconnect to this traditional element from our unique perspectives. I was additionally inspired by Indigenous Wayuu

artisans in Venezuela and their process for the fabrication of chinchorros (hammocks), and tapetes (mats). I noticed both the Wayuu people of Venezuela and flamenco artists valued these artisanal works.

I took this premise as an initial research task to understand flamenco through my own experiences as a Latina immigrant artist. Something about connecting to tradition from a clean perspective, as my emerging identity continues to transform and adapt to new settings, continues to be very present within my practice. How to connect to flamenco from

Shortly, I understood the greater purpose of this piece was reestablishing connections. Some of the themes that began emerging: community as support in the migrant process; resolving and giving closure to unfinished businesses when emigrating; making visible the invisible of our stories as immigrant women; connecting to our newer communities; and allowing our identities to transform to find belonging. These concepts became evident among conversations as if the entire women migrant community was trying to shout and this work was meant

I FELT AS IF I COULD VISUALLY REFERENCE SO MANY INCREDIBLE STORIES, EACH THREAD HAD SO MUCH ENERGY AND POWER.

my own experience as a Latina in exile, as a multidisciplinary artist, as a filmmaker? How to find a true reinterpretation of these traditional elements from a very genuine connection to their original raw materials, fiber, wood, metal without being a prisoner of their traditional structures, uses and demands?

I began the process of fabrication. Initially I thought the conversations with the migrant women would happen in parallel to its construction, in and out of the process, without necessarily being an active element in the actual construction. The labor and the monotony of the fabrication became quickly unbearable. My body was straining so much in the process that my conversations with these women became almost a necessity to break some of the monotony of the process, and to begin understanding the deeper purpose that this work had in store for me and the community I was creating. Soon I had some of these women helping me physically cut the threads. Others were videoconferencing in from various parts of the world, calling me, texting me.

to create an opportunity for these important concepts to be discussed, exposed, and performed in our communities at large.

As the work emerged, its presence began signifying an incredible responsibility. I felt as if I could visually reference so many incredible stories, each thread had so much energy and power. My body couldn't carry so much and give these stories enough justice. I knew then that the work was meant to be interactive. I wanted the greater community to find their own connections to the installation. Our artistic legacy as Venezuelans in exile had been completely displaced and dispersed, and I have an immediate need to give these migrant communities a chance to be part of this legacy. As well as to allow our newer surrounding communities to understand our stories and their important part in it.

THE FILM

In the film *Markme* the prototype of the installation was built. Mariana Martinez, my collaborating dancer, had to go through a process of deconstruction within her own body

conditioned to tradition. The threads became a support for her to hold herself within that process, to free herself from those conventions and re-entangle herself into tradition with a completely rejuvenated dominance over traditional structures. It didn't surprise me that the installation became this support system for her in the same way the community of migrant women became a support to me when I built it. Once more, I felt the need to expose these stories, as if they were shouting at me to be included in the conversation.

During the development of the film, we talked about ways to include these migrant women's voices somehow in the work. We researched gestures and movement qualities inspired by key concepts in the conversations: freedom, acceptance, and belonging. This was just the beginning of a massive conceptual framework, and we understood from these early stages that the work had so much in store that needed to be developed.

THE PAINTINGS

The aim of the multidisciplinary project was to work at the intersection of art and performance, to generate value in performance art, and to create a sense of ephemerality through visual art. I wanted to create a project where both visual art and performance art needed to coexist to be fully understood.

My paintings emerged as visual documentation of climax moments of performance in the film. Every knot created in the installation during the shooting of the film itself was translated into painting and further transformed by a creative response. Following the original form that emerged from this translation, I allowed my body to react in response to the recall from the experiences in the film, as well as the stimulus given by the form itself. The resolution of movement that had been finalized with the knot as the mark of that experience left in the installation now had a way to be relived within painting. As soon as the knot covered in paint touches the

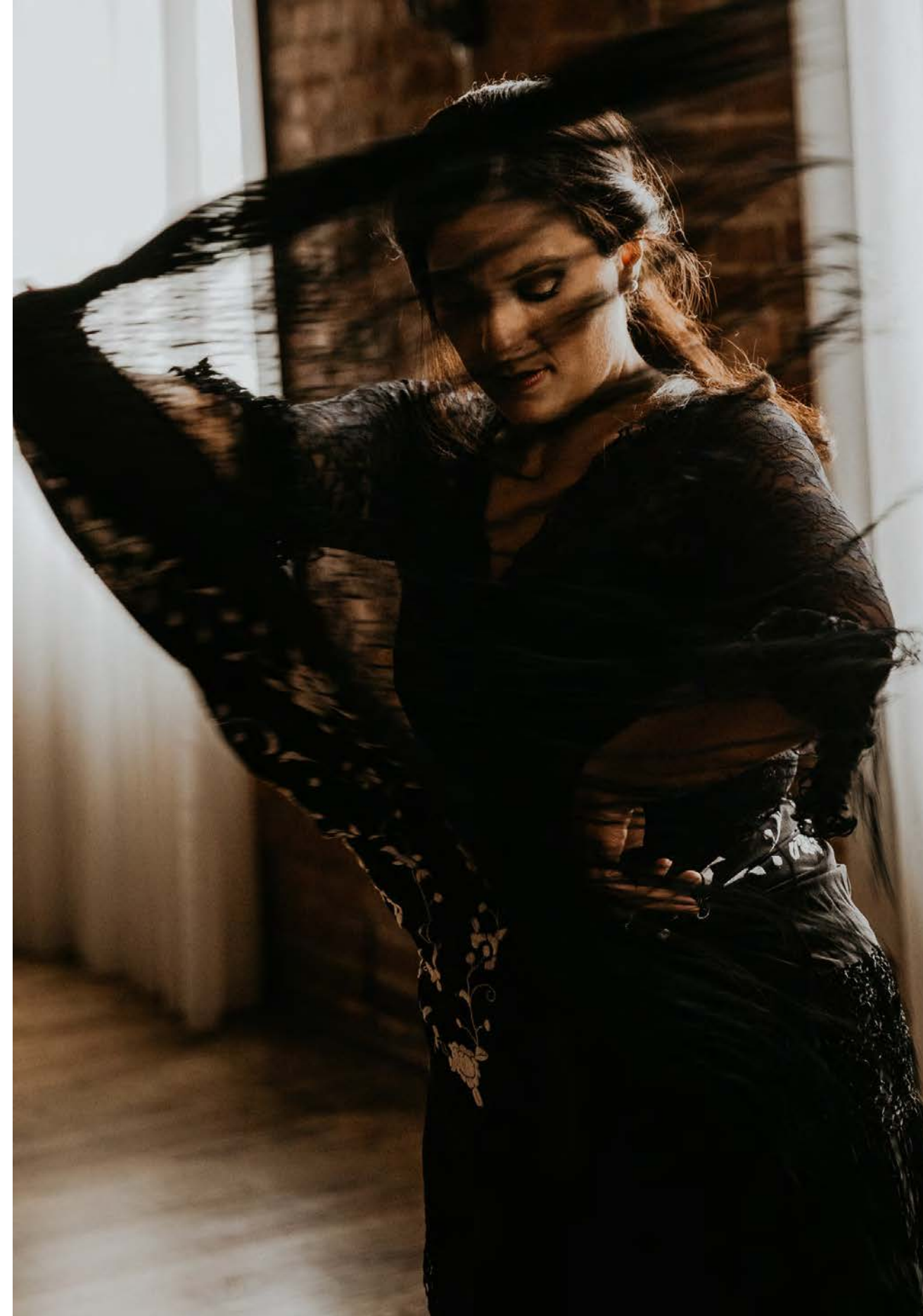


PHOTO BY FLEETING FOX PHOTOGRAPHY

wood panel there is immediate transformation. This becomes a clear interpretation of the Latina immigrant identity and how it continues to transform as it relates to new environments in the process of migration.

These painting collections continue transforming every time the project gets to be presented. The second installation, created at [MACLA Gallery](#) as part of the exhibition "On Traditions and Repetition", now carries hundreds of knots created by community members that encountered the work

over time. These will get individually translated into paintings for the next show, exhibition, performance.

MARKME ON STAGE

The final phase of this multidisciplinary project intends to showcase every aspect of the work within a live music and dance production on stage. The work began in film, continued into the gallery, and now finds its way into the theater.

The third and biggest installation yet will be on stage at Journey Downtown

Theater in Vacaville this February. The installation and the interactions in and through its threads will become the focal point of the entire production. Performers will activate the work's transformation throughout the evening, and audiences will have the opportunity to be part of its evolution—creating their mark, which will then be translated into the next set of paintings. The stage becomes a setting for interactive art, and the installation becomes an ephemeral kinetic sculpture of sorts.

The work intends to highlight Latina immigrant's stories through the transformation of the installation and the repositioning of ourselves as Latinas within the context of flamenco art and music. There is a clear focus in connecting back to materials in their primitive state, to strip our relationship to any preconceived notions of tradition. We are building ourselves from the ground up. As immigrant artists we find ourselves in constant adaptation, starting a new life, establishing connections in our communities, always looking to find a way to belong in the midst of an ever changing relationship to tradition.

MarkMe On Stage premieres at Journey Downtown Theater in Vacaville, CA, February 4, 2023 at 7:00pm - [Tickets available online](#); MarkMe On Stage is supported by a CA\$H grant from [Dancer's Group](#), [The Cultural Growth fund by On Stage Vacaville](#), and [Journey Downtown](#).

ANGELA ARTERITANO is a Venezuelan American multidisciplinary artist, choreographer, and researcher, based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Studio Art and a Master of Fine Arts in Choreography. Her work deals with issues of migration and identity. Her work has been recognized and supported by various non-profit organizations including the 2021 *Cultura Power Grant Awardee* by MACLA; the Studio 210 Summer Residency (2021); and CA\$H grant (2022). Her film *Markme* has been broadly recognized and awarded by film festivals around the world, including the recognition of Best First Time Director by the Vesuvius International Film Festival in Campania, Italy, Honorary Mention at the London International Monthly Film Festival, and Semi-finalist for Best Women Empowerment Short at the Paris International Short Festival.

at some point

The following are twelve moments that ping pong through time to reflect on our past, present, and future selves.

By **Andersmith**

1 I’m shuffling through the bookshelves avoiding a time-sensitive task and looking through my old notebooks – ideas from classes and workshops that were momentarily impactful, titles of dances that we never made, rehearsal notes, drawings of spatial pathways, partially crossed off to-do lists, barely legible logic that made sense only on that one day.

“flamingo inversion + toe walking torso hang”

It’s a memory vault of what was important. Some of these notes feel far away, of a different person. Some I remember very clearly, in the body.

*“A series of /beginnings/
/endings/”*

7 I don’t recognize any of these faces. Maybe that shirt. A timpani, a harp, a confused child looking out their window at all the adults milling about drinking wine in plastic cups.

Pretty decent wine, actually.

2 I’ve been here before. I’ve been here so many times. A different version of the same thing. The same thing, different. When will someone invent the “warm up” pill?

*“Back of body on the floor.
Heel bones to the back of the skull.
Resist. Release.”*

The floor is colder than I want so I keep layers on to cover bare skin. I’m tired of being here. I don’t want to be anywhere else.

*“Show up
again
and again
and again.”*

I’m always doing the same thing but I’m always doing it different. It has a changing sameness.

8 A 6pm curtain is now an *about 6pm* curtain and soon it’ll be a *some time after 6pm* curtain but the eventual-ity is that the start time will unofficially be rescheduled to *at some point tonight*. Was there a bar we walked past earlier that looked dark and cozy? When do we go to bars anymore?

Tonight. We’ll stop there tonight after this ends.

3 My grandma, at nearly 88, still works a few hours a week teaching memoir writing to older adults. Most of the “older adults” are younger than her. I hope I continue to love my work enough to want to do it until I am in my late eighties. I hope I am able to continue to do the work into my late eighties.

*“Yield to push, horizontal and vertical
Arrive to dissolve”*

Many of her students come to her class with the desire to write stories of their lives for their families. At each class she gives them a prompt: an image, a poem, a flower – something that sparks a memory about which they write. An act of looking back in order to leave something for the future.

9 But the bucket with the lightbulb and what looks like stage blood? When will they ever use that? Is that a part of this?

A man walks through the background, stops and stares at the dance. Maybe he was looking at us looking back at him. I’m sure someone thought, “yes NOW this is art.” Maybe it was, I don’t have a good view of what’s happening. I shouldn’t have stood behind this plant.

Props that were displayed and are now being used: chairs are sat in, tables are stood upon, a timpani pounded. The harp uncovered and plucked and scratched.

4 When we first started conceiving of what would become Good Strong Hands, we imagined a performance that accumulated and changed over time. Remnants of each performance would remain on stage for the next performance so that over the course of the run the work itself would necessarily change. The peel of a banana eaten during opening night would eventually rot or clothing taken off during each performance would, over time, become a mound of fabric.

We thought about how the past affects the present, which then impacts the future. Ultimately, we kept our clothes on and cleaned up the banana peel every night.

*“Repeat the action
from memory, without thinking.
Stay, longer than desired”*

10 What in the fuck am I looking at? Is that a horn? Is it a mini-computer? It makes a sound of winter winds cutting me down and a ship sounding its foghorn, looking for port in the haze.

I bet it’s more than \$500. Maybe I’ll buy a cheaper version and add it to the collection of instruments I think I’m going to learn at some point.

5 *“Resist forwardness.
Turn your fucking head.
Be in the in-between.”*

I love the beginning of a new creative process. That period of time before choices have to be made, experimenting and generating and working within a balance of commitment to the idea and non-attachment to its outcome.

In a recent conversation with choreographer Aura Fishbeck, we were discussing this love and the tension it can create – the pull to remain in a space of exploration and unearthing alongside the necessity to shape a work so it can be witnessed and experienced by others. “And isn’t that the work?” she said. “To set up the conditions within the work so that it continues to reveal itself.” In this way, the present and the future are constantly unfolding together. Our current selves in conversation with our future selves, in real time. A sort of resistance to future forming.

11 It used to start and end with a train ride. Now it’s cars – one of us taking a stand about the state of art, one of us trying not to get in a wreck on the 110.

Tonight’s a train ride again – we’re excited for the experience of a public space and not having any distraction (i.e. driving) to keep us from unpacking what we just saw.

We’re silent and the windows are tinted so all we get are blurry lights zipping by.

On one hand, the buildings and density of the city feel so distant, like we’re not in LA. On the other hand, it would’ve been nice to have a view.

6 I recently took class from Sean Curran, a New York-based choreographer and educator. He was in town to work with Loyola Marymount University students who were performing a restaging of an Arnie Zane piece. Sean first danced this piece more than 30 years ago, well before the dancers who were now performing it were even born.

We were doing a 7-count traveling phrase across the floor. At one point, the accompanist started playing a lovely marimba-sounding rhythm from his iPhone. Seeing this, Sean shouted out with child-like glee, “The future is now!”

*“Reversals and retrogrades
Redirect away from the center
Commit (loosely) to the back space”*

12 At some point I’ll revise this edit of an excerpt of a monologue from a 2016 work-in-progress shared show from when we still lived and worked in San Francisco.

“When they are 600 they will stop beating rocks together hoping that fire comes out. They’ll lift their hands from the ground and stand tall in the sun. They will look to the stars and feel the dual sensation of being completely inconsequential and completely in control of their own destiny.

When they are 600 – feeling like they just started and how could it already be so late – they will stare into mirrors, willing their cracked faces smooth. They’ll try to remember the clearest lake, and wonder if they’ll ever get to return. They will wonder when they went from something to behold, to something to be held, to just barely holding on.

ANDERSMITH is an LA-based multidisciplinary collaboration that brings together movement, theater, and music to create work that deals with the quotidian and the extraordinary, the body and effort, and the blurred line between what is real and the absurd. Led by Arletta Anderson and Adam Smith, their work has been seen at various locations throughout the U.S. and the Internet.

dancing



by CHARLOTTE MORAGA
PHOTOS BY RAVI KOHLI

rivers

LIKE A RIVER

First and foremost, I identify as a mother. Second and foremost, I identify as a dancer. I always have, even before I could name it. I remember standing in my front yard as a small child in Miami, Florida, throwing my head back and twirling, staring at the clouds spinning until they swirled into a frothy milkshake and collapsing in the warm tickly grass completely spent and satisfied with being. Those moments of being fully alive were almost only found in dance. And also in nature. Growing up in Miami I spent many weekends in the [Everglades](#). Known as the “river of grass,” it teems with life. That connection to nature informs how I live, how I move, how I mother, and how I create dances to a great extent.

How I make dances is also influenced by my connection to Kathak. I had been a professional dancer on the East Coast. And when I moved to San Francisco, I went back to college to get a teaching credential. I needed PE credits, so I wanted to enroll in Rosa Montoya’s flamenco class. It was full, so I enrolled in Kathak but I had no idea it was Classical Indian Dance. It blew my mind. The instructor blew my mind. I had danced my whole life, but it wasn’t until I met my Guruji, Pandit Chitresh Das, in 1992 that I serendipitously found my calling.

My Guruji was Bengali (although he referred to himself as a Bengali-Rajput-Californian) and like most Bengalis, he worshiped *Maa* (mother). He was a brilliant and one-of-a-kind artist and guru (a profound mentor). Nowadays, the word guru often has a negative connotation, or at best is misunderstood. I use this word in the traditional sense, in relation to the *guru shishya parampara*, which is the traditional way of transmitting the art form of Kathak dance. For 20 years I danced as a soloist and a principal dancer in his creative works. One thing my Guruji always talked about: “I lay the stepping stones and one day I will bow down and you will step onto my back

and cross the river.” I come from an unbroken line of *guru shishya parampara* tradition. Like a river, the knowledge flows from one generation to the next.

IN DECEMBER 2015, I gave his two little girls, Shivaranjani and Saadhvi, a book about a famous tree hugger, Amrita Devi Bishnoi. The book described the 1730 [\(Khejarli\) massacre](#) of 363 Bishnoi villagers who hugged the trees to keep them from being felled by the Maharaja’s men. It didn’t work. They were chopped down with the trees. My Guruji loved the story and said it was going to be our next school show and I was going to choreograph it. That didn’t happen because he passed away suddenly a few weeks later. But the seed was planted. I had already been choreographing small bits and pieces for Chitresh Das Dance Com-

pany, works such as *Pancha Jati* (2002 and 2014), whole scenes in *Sita Haran* (2009) and *Shabd* (2010), *Yatra* (2015), and *Shiva* (2016) to name a few. I kept thinking about that story.

Three years later, in 2018, 150 dancers performed *Aranya Katha* (story of the trees) on the stage in the Chitresh Das Institute’s (CDI) annual school show. (CDI holds annual school shows which include performers from beginning to advanced level students, ages 6–60. Generally, CDI produces two



shows a year, our spring school show and our fall home season. The spring shows lay the groundwork for our fall home season productions). My next work *Mantram* was to focus on the *Maha Pancha Bhuta* (the five elements) and how the elements are affected by climate change. The year was 2020 and we got shut down, shut up, and shut in. The fires that raged politically, socially, emotionally and quite literally throughout California consumed me and *Mantram* became very fire forward. The work was performed for the first time in our fall home season 2021.

Now it was time for the antidote: water. We started with trees that hold Earth, unleashed Wind and Fire, and now it was time for Water to soothe, to cleanse, to rebirth us.

RIVERS

On one of our tours, back in the late '90s, we performed in the Indian city of Agra. The day after, our hosts took us to see the iconic Taj Mahal, which is situated on the banks of the Jamuna river. I had been dancing along the banks of the Jamuna since my first Kathak class, in my

imagination. We were taught to dance a poem, a *kavita*, “*Jamuna ke tat par nacheta Kanhaiya....*” which translates to “Lord Krishna playing his flute by the banks of the Jamuna.” What I saw wasn’t my Jamuna. It was dried up. Didn’t flow. You could walk across it without getting your ankles wet but you wouldn’t want to. It looked muddy and lifeless. Plastic bags littered the shore rather than the lotus flowers we show with a flurry of wrist movements and fingers unfurling. In our dance, or in my imagination, these banks were always green and lush with flowers and fragrance, animals and teeming with life. Seeds were planted for the work I wanted to create in the future.

I started researching. I found lots of pictures online of Jamuna, travel shots with gorgeous sunsets, and then poison: shots of monumental pollution; diaphanous clouds of white foam from toxic chemicals; untreated sewage; agricultural and industrial runoff. It was not difficult to accept the dissonance between the reality of the polluted Jamuna and the dances of Radha and Krishna along

the pastoral banks of the Jamuna of our mythology because of the story of Kaliya, an evil demon who pollutes the river. This is an ancient story from the *puranas*, but the metaphor is pertinent and powerful today. Krishna, our hero, of course defeats the demon. So all ends well. It made me wonder. Was there ever a time of pristine pastoral bliss?

One of the things I learned from my Guruji is that there are so many layers to everything. It is one of the things, I believe, that is so misunderstood about Kathak dance specifically, and traditional art forms in general. He was such a special artist in part because he was able to honor and celebrate the tradition while simultaneously questioning it and pushing the boundaries of the artform. He was an unabashed Kathak and Indian classical art advocate, but questioned sexism, casteism, ageism, and many other isms within the art and within the culture. This questioning approach to the stories is something that is fundamental to making them meaningful and relevant to our lives in this day and age. I don’t know if many gurus encourage questioning like this, but he never ended a class without saying “Three questions asked” (meaning, “Ask me three questions”). I think this was essential to his teachings.

INVOKING THE RIVER

The seeds had taken root. With climate change becoming palpable in the most striking and sometimes horrific ways – floods and drought, fires and storms, devastating weather patterns that displace peoples and cultures – I feel compelled to bring urgency to our need to find balance and harmony with our Mother, and each other. We are all Krishna. And we are all Kaliya. We have to face our own inner demons, and outer ones as well. We have to examine our lives and how our culture of convenience might be the environment in which Kaliya thrives. We have to

save ourselves from ourselves. This was the theme of our most recent school show *Jamuna ke Tata Par* in May 2022.

It is this idea of river as source, of rivers as the veins of our Mother, and this idea of a river of knowledge passed generation to generation, that started me thinking about the many layers of my new Kathak work, *Invoking the River*, which premiered Fall 2022.

THE GANDA BANDHAN ceremony is a ritual in which the guru (teacher) officially accepts the Shishya (student) as a disciple, someone who will carry on the legacy. When I tied strings with my Guruji on the banks of the sacred river Ganga at Dakishwara temple in Kolkata in 2002, I didn’t take it lightly. I made a pact: to learn, to teach, to dance, to go deep, and then share it with the world. To pass it on. I see the next generation looking for a way forward but also leading the way forward. They have their own questions and they have their own answers! This work had to be stepping stones on that path for them and with them. So, they became my collaborators. We talked about the sacred rivers of India. The rivers of our imagination. The rivers of our dance. What is happening to water? Who is responsible? What to do?

In India, and indeed many places around the world, rivers are goddesses. The personification of the river is something we are very familiar with and that resonates deeply within us in Kathak dance.

I asked my dancers to imagine they are the river. How would they move? Why would they move? How would they carve through space as the river? Where would they move to and from? And why? Is a river ever still? Starting with these, and many more questions, they carved out a narrative for themselves that was very personal.

One of the dancers had two grandparents pass away in 2020



in India from Covid, so she wanted to put herself in Ganga’s shores as it lapped at the Manikarnika ghats (sacred crematory grounds). She says of the process, “When I took a step back, I realized *Invoking the River* was about everything washing through me, and everything from the past being within me, as well. It’s super cool to think, ‘This water may have been in me previously.’ So, *Invoking the River* for me was more about the water than the river itself.” (Visit the [CDI blog](#) to read more about their personal experiences.) Utsav Lal’s evocative piano melodies and rhythms became the framework for their respective solos. Alka Raghuram’s immersive poem-films became the *Sutradhar* (translates literally to “thread-holder,” but roughly as leader of the play), the narrator that tied the stories together. Our creative juices flowed together, like a river.

Their solos were bookended by two group choreographies. The first being a quintessential origin story of how the river goddess Ganga came to Earth. Ganga’s life force was so

powerful it would have destroyed the people and land, so, she asked Shiva to catch her in his locks, and thus she flowed down from the heavens.

The last section, *Sangam*, revolved around the meeting and melding of the rivers who invoke their sister Saraswati. Saraswati – the mythological river and goddess of learning and the arts – is a ripe metaphor for the transmission of knowledge and a path forward. *Sangam* left us feeling immersed in her waters. Drenched in her beauty, her care, and her wisdom, we may just stay here.

CHARLOTTE MORAGA is currently the artistic director of the Chitresh Das Institute. She has been dancing, teaching dance, performing, and making dances most of her life. But it wasn’t until her serendipitous meeting of Pandit Chitresh Das 30 years ago that she found her calling. A principal dancer with the Chitresh Das Dance Company for 20 years, she still performs occasionally, but finds joy and meaning in teaching and creating dances. Charlotte also teaches dance and art for the San Francisco Unified School District. When not teaching or dancing or making dances you can find her hiking the hills of San Francisco. You can email Charlotte at charlotte@chitreshdasinstitute.org.



PHOTOS BY RAVI KOHLI

Notes on Rendering Vessels

by JAMES FLEMING

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This writing is an accumulation of reflections on transformation taken from dark/lessons/rupture, an evening of performance excerpts featuring new works by Jess Curtis and Beyond Gravity artists, Silk Worm and RUPTURE (jose e. abad, Gabriele Christian, Stephanie Hewett, Styles Alexander, and Clarissa Dyas), co-presented by Gravity and Counter-Pulse. These works will premiere in 2023.*

For the program description for each new work, please see “More about dark/lessons/rupture” below.



PHOTO BY SAAMI BLOOM

I dark

We are feeling for a place for new things to grow. A thing that gives form, simulates, then supersedes, a vessel then for rendering.

Switch the flowers in the vase. Maybe replace the vase altogether and lay the flowers on the table, on the floor. Add a side dish, a cut of roast chicken. Turn the lights down, turn them off entirely. Now it's a party.

In total darkness, dancers move across the stage. Murmurations and breathwork accompany the vibrational resonance of feet slapping and sliding across the marley floor. Fluid air oscillates from their bodies to ours, an intractable embrace.

In the absence of light, the stage expands into endless surface, like a

vase cut down the middle and spread by a dough roller. It is malleable, soft.

The vessel is thrown over a poised ensemble of dancers. A small light flashes in the hands of Gerald Pirner and his voice calls out across the pitch-black expanse:

Here is a hand on a shoulder, a head with hair dangling down, a hand and an arm, a head in their lap, the body laying on the floor. Michelangelo's Pietà. It reminds me of the Pietà in Rome. A modern Pietà in America.

With each flash of the light in his hand, a light sculpture renders into 'the picture as it were a blind invention of the picture'.¹ It is felt through bated air over the hairs on our arms, gilt on the cheek, as dancers carom in darkness.

A multitude of embracing forms spread across the stage, beyond the stricture of light, where artists are passing² through pietàs, are becoming mama rays³, in verdant twilight sky.

II lessons

*Be sure to remove the sack containing the neck and innards from the cavity.*⁴

The vessel is soft, pliable. It has skin, like a bird for roasting. It washes the harvest season's terrible history of destruction away with splashes of giblet-infused gravy.

1 Pirner, Gerald. "Ueber." Geraldpirner.com. n.d.

2 "A feeling-vector contemplates its passage, attending to the dance of an occasion coming into itself." Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*. p. 62.

3 Mutu, Wangechi. *MamaRay*. 2020. Nasher Museum of Art, USA. <https://emuseum.nasher.duke.edu/objects/24120/mamaray;jsessionid=3B98710F9B7DBBD92F745B-0050C0838F>

4 Clark, Melissa. "How to Cook a Turkey." New York Times. November 25, 2022. <https://cooking.nytimes.com/guides/13-how-to-cook-a-turkey>

When I close my eyes, I recall Cate Blanchett presiding over her family thanksgiving dinner in prayer: *I am for... ham art, pork art, chicken art, tomato art, banana art, apple art, turkey art, cake art, cookie art. I am for an art that is combed down, that is hung from each ear, that is laid on the lips and under the eyes, that is shaved from the legs, that is brushed from the teeth, that is fixed from the thighs, that is slipped on the foot.*⁵

When I open my eyes, Silk Worm is there, posing gloriously on the pedestal for the audience. She is covered in a many-hued garnish of boas.

One step at a time, she presents to us *Lessons in Anatomy*.

Step 1: hold onto your ultimate outcome with your mind and your favorite cooking vessel in your hand.

The vessel is prepared delicately, it is patted dry and probably rubbed with salt all over. Inside it, Silk constructs a repository for the semiotics of 'bodily transformation, namely with changing sex'.⁶

Above her, a sonic drone laps and lays, swaps and enfolds: lips smack, liquids pour down throats, cans pop and fizz as material is pushed by the larynx into an acidic oceanscape of the stomach. Composer Jules Lc fills the vessel with the gestational interior spaces of the body, where silence becomes something of an embodied sine wave.

5 *Manifesto* (11). Directed by Julien Rosefeldt, performance by Cate Blanchett. 2017. In the piece, Blanchett is reciting remixed excerpts from Claes Oldenburg's essay, "I Am For..." (1961). <https://www.julianrosefeldt.com/film-and-video-works/manifesto-2014-2015/manifesto-pop-art/>

6 In a conversation about *Lessons in Anatomy* between Silk and I, she references Martha Rosler's "Semiotics of the Kitchen" (1975), a performance piece that explores the commodification of women's roles in the kitchen. Rosler describes the seminal piece, saying that "as she speaks, she names her own oppression."

By Step 7, Silk instructs the audience: *Open the oven door wider. Force yourself to confront a raw chicken, a greasy little bird lying in the dark waiting for the sun to come up.*

The vessel reveals itself through an intimate congress of 'psychic garbage', in a language that congeals and affixes like cold gravy solidifying on your plate.

As the heap roasts, Silk cries out jubilantly: *You did it! Look at that bird. Oil, chicken juices, dead flesh, crispy meat. The color, slammin! Super flavorsome.*

Teetering on a black banister above the audience, she waves into the lights, reciting the lyrics of Humpty Dumpty. A cagey wink and a flick of her wrist and the vessel is sent off; dinner, and the past with it, is over.

III &theruptureisnow

It is no secret that vessels often lie. They hold things plucked from elsewhere, like flowers in a vase, rosemary and sage and thyme in the cavity, all of us in the places we're in.



Dancers collect around a table. Hands move swiftly beneath an iridescent coterie of laughter. They are playing spades, which is also to say they are studying⁷ how to make the future.

The movement set expands onto the dance floor, Gabriele Christian, Clarissa Dyas, and Stephanie Hewett develop a score, working each sequence toward organic unity. With each pass, improvisational variations are loosely woven together, we cry out in joy as they alight in unison. Gabriele grins, improvises an alternate advance, and the frame-work expands again.

I speak to RUPTURE collaborator jose e. abad over the phone. They describe to me a rich tapestry of the collective's multi-year collaboration exploring Black Life, drawing from deep research and engagements with Ishmael Houston-Jones, Joanna Haigood, and Fred Moten, among others.

jose says: *The rupture in these artistic spaces is when we get together and be in a place of freedom and exploration and study together. It ruptures the chokehold on queer Black arts and culture, we're imagining our coming together is a rupture within these places, spaces that we adore but also rely on.*

The ensemble rests together on the floor, limbs intertwining into a state of decadent relaxation. Above, a film of Styles Alexander whispers stunning mnemonic poems, toward a deep future through the ages, across 'a sea of sunflowers' at their back, through nights of 'delicate fervor', the visionary promise:

⁷ From *&theruptureisnow* performance description, the collective is "working through Fred Moten's understanding of 'study' as all that you 'do with other people...talking, walking...under the name of speculative practice.'"

*Either way we will arrive
To renege, rebel, recall, rename,
We will continue to remember
We will continue to rupture.*

Vessels dissolve in a yawn-screed of cicadas, in the undulating weave of Moktar's Arabic instrumentation⁸, culminating in the transcendent bell beat of Madre Guía's Solar Plexus Defense⁹.

Clarissa calls out and the audience floods the stage in reverie to join the dance.

Edges and borders burst forth, blooming into the provisional space for buds to grow, as the beat sheds the theater's semblance, becoming now something of a field of wildflowers.

Above us, ontological exhalations of crew alight as the ensemble pose together. Liminal affection plays through referential glimpses and strokes. They are figuring it out¹⁰, a commitment to rendering a future beyond the temporal containment of a vessel; a dance; a performance; on a stage; for an audience; inside an institution.

Turns out, there is no vessel. No container exists to render toward utopia, only artists at the fore, tracing improvisational desire lines¹¹ toward a more caring and revelrous future.

⁸ Moktar. "PEAR." *HeForShe x femme culture Vol. 4*, femme culture. Bandcamp. Track 8. 2022. <https://femmeculture.bandcamp.com/track/moktar-pear>

⁹ Guía, Madre. "Solar Plexus Defense." *Ancestral Frequencies EP*. Bandcamp. Track 3. 2021. <https://madreguia.bandcamp.com/track/solar-plexus-defense>

¹⁰ Moten, Fred. "Stefano Harney & Fred Moten." *The Poetry Project*. April 24, 2015. <https://soundcloud.com/poetry-project-audio/stefano-harney-fred-moten-april-24th-2015>. In conversation with jose, they reference an excerpt from this recording. Moten describes how "this kind of weird inking or transformation might begin to occur in which you realize that what we've been trying to figure out how to get to is how we are when we get together to try to figure it out."

¹¹ Mitchel, Rashaun; Reiner, Silas. *Desire Lines*. 2017-2018. <http://www.rashaunsilasdance.com/desire-lines>

More About *dark/lessons/rupture*

Into The Dark is a new ensemble work instigated by Jess Curtis in collaboration with a diverse ensemble of Blind, Low Vision and Sighted performers, addressing the physical, subconscious, and literal effects of western culture's binary mythologizing of darkness and light (Artists: Jess Curtis, Sherwood Chen, Gabriele Christian, Rachael Dichter, Gerald Pirner, Tiffany Taylor).

Lessons in Anatomy, a new solo(ish) piece from Silk Worm, aims to create a repository for all the negative thoughts, fears, doubts, and second guesses that come with bodily transformation, namely with changing sex. Navigating a medicalized transition, it turns out, produces a landfill's worth of psychic garbage, and *Lessons in Anatomy* hopes to take out the trash.

&theruptureisnow, an excerpt of a large prismatic performance work by the RUPTURE collective (jose e. abad, Styles Alexander, Gabriele Christian, Clarissa Dyas, and Stephanie Hewett) premiering in late 2023, shares some of the group's research on Afro-Diasporic – primarily African-American – folk games and functions as sites of chance, vernacular, and transformation. Working through Fred Moten's understanding of "study" as all that you "do with other people... talking, walking...under the name of speculative practice," RUPTURE sources recreation, rest, and revelry as the anchors between community care and stage composition.

JAMES FLEMING writes about performance, queer futures, and new natures. His recent writing can be seen in SFMOMA's Open Space and Art Practical.

**FROM STREETS CORNERS TO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES
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C^{IN}COMMUNITY

DAVID HERRERA PERFORMANCE COMPANY

[David Herrera Performance Company](#) announces the 2023 LatinXtensions cohorts LatinXtensions is the only comprehensive culturally centered mentorship and networking program in the United States. The 12-month program advises emerging Latinx dance artists in developing their professional artistic practice. Capacity building focuses on non-profit management skills, producing, grant writing practice, equity best practices, engaging communities, building artistic networks, articulating values, and long-term career goals.

The program also focuses on creating a network with other regional and national Latinx artists; thus developing a rich and thriving community support system of dance artists, presenters, curators, and collaborators.

Bay Area Cohort

Dey de Guzman
Karla Flores
Daniela Garcia
Gilberto Martinez

National Cohort

Amelia Rose Estrada (Boston, MA)
Mario Ramirez (Austin, TX)
Rio Saul Garcia Ramirez (Salinas, CA)
Yesica Abrajan (New York, NY)
Lenin Fernandez (Nashville, TN)



PHOTO BY WATT WONG

BLISS DANCE COMPANY

[Bliss Dance Company](#) uses contemporary dance to tell women's stories, and hosts the annual Bliss Dance Festival, which celebrates womxn's sexual empowerment and expression.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STANLEY CHANG

Victor Talledos

[Victor Talledos](#) is a professional dancer, educator, and choreographer originally from Mexico City, trained in Classical Ballet, Modern Dance, Contemporary Dance and later in life obsessed with movement research, Improvisation and exploration.

He currently offers a variety of open classes for the Adult dance community as well as the pre-professional and professional dancer at Alonzo King Lines Dance Center and Berkeley Ballet Theater.

New adult Ballet classes for the new year at the San Francisco Ballet School!



PHOTO BY UOIA DANILLER

BAY AREA DANCE WEEK

APRIL 21-30

After a three-year hiatus, this inclusive celebration of movement and dance returns! Join us at the Kickoff on Saturday, April 22 at [Yerba Buena Gardens](#) with another amazing One Dance by [Dudley Flores at Rhythm & Motion](#) and free dance events.



PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

REYES DANCE

[REYES Dance](#), founded in 2017 by Artistic Director Jocelyn Reyes, is a contemporary dance company that blends athleticism, everyday gestures, humor and storytelling to question traditions, belief systems, and toxic behavioral patterns, in order to reimagine healthier ways of relating to ourselves and others. REYES Dance also curates an annual film festival, Dance Thrill Fest, featuring works by Bay Area artists. Stay tuned about upcoming performances by following their social media page and/or signing up to their newsletter.

BEYOND ISADORA/ JOANNA G. HARRIS PH.D.

After many years of dance training in NY with the Duncan Dance Guild, the New Dance Group, Graham, Limón and Cunningham, [Joanna G. Harris](#) came to the Bay Area to study at Mills College with Marian Van Tuyl and Eleanor Lauer.

She previously taught at UC Berkeley, formed her own company, the Monday Night Group touring California, and founded the Dance/Drama Department at UC Santa Cruz and the Creative Arts Therapy program at Lone Mountain College. Harris also writes reviews and essays about dance for websites and print publications.



COURTESY OF CUBACARIBE

Alayo Dance Company

[Alayo Dance Company](#) was founded in 2001 by Ramon Ramos Alayo and is currently the resident company of CubaCaribe. Alayo's work is an innovative fusion of Afro-Cuban modern, folkloric and popular Cuban dance. He eloquently articulates his aesthetic vision through a synthesis of these dance styles, citing from each traditions, movements, narratives and concepts indicative of Cuban culture.

CubaCaribe's 17th Annual Festival of Dance & Music will premiere *Mouth of a Shark* (March 2023) by Alayo. A reflection on the lives of immigrants, *Mouth of a Shark* is inspired in part by Somali poet Warsan Shire's poem Home.



Audrey Johnson

Audrey Johnson (she/her) is a dance artist creating at the intersections of movement, poetry, and land. She creates with an ethos of care and joy grounded in a lineage of queer Black feminist praxis.

Audrey is currently developing her project land|body|memory, in an iterative dance performance and research project occurring a series of movement prayers. www.audreyjohnson.space



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAFEHOUSE ARTS

SAFEHOUSE ARTS

[SAFEhouse Arts](#) invites you to the Winter 2023 RAW (Resident Artist Workshop) Showcase! See original work and performances from local and emerging artists in the Bay Area. This is a season you do not want to miss!

Can't make it in person? We are now streaming our RAW Shows! Visit the website to purchase streaming tickets or scan the code in our linktree!



PHOTO BY JACOB'S PILLOW

LA MEZCLA

Follow their new project *Ghostly Labor*! Following the premiere and international screenings of *Ghostly Labor: a Dance Film*, [La Mezcla](#) will spend the year developing the project into a full length production; this includes an In Progress Showing and talk back on January 14, 2023 (both at Brava Theater).

Revival performance of *Pachuquismo* at Brava! for Women in the Arts, March 11-12, 2023; we are excited to perform at home once again following our first national tour!

La Mezcla's New York City debut at The Lincoln Center March 18-19, 2023, featuring selections of *Pachuquismo*.

Keep your eyes open for the 2023 Connecting Communities Program and donation-based workshops!



KHEPRI PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS:

Tommy King Belly Dance Workshops & Shows

Created by belly dance teacher, performer, choreographer, and Director, [Andrea Sendek](#), Khepri Productions is an event company that produces multi-disciplinary collaborations with celebrated national and international artists to teach workshops and intensives on dance, music, and culture.



PUSH Dance Company

BIPOC Artist Sanctuary opening in January 2023!

The [BIPOC Artist Sanctuary](#) vision includes BASE, a monumental endeavor to share reparative and restorative dance practices through classes, workshops, residencies and performances. The exceptional design allows for a convertible studio for large or small gatherings. By supporting PUSH Dance Company, you'll be growing a dynamic vision to amplify the voices of BIPOC artists in the heart of downtown San Francisco.

www.blackboxstudiosoakland.com

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