



FALL 2023

# indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.14 The Cypher, The Circle & The Drums



P.36 Taking Up Space



P.42 A QUEERspace For All

## MEMBERSHIP

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

Dancers' Group's membership program is a fee-free model. We value connecting (with you) and sharing (what you're doing). If you're interested in connecting, JOIN as a Community Member.

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# WELCOME

by [ROWENA RICHIE](#), Guest Editor



### THE BAY AREA IS DEFINED BY ITS BRIDGES:

the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, the Carquinez Bridge, the San Mateo Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge and the Bay Bridge. This issue of *In Dance* is all about bridges and bridging, too. The way dance and our local dance community span divides of various kinds to connect and enrich.

Members of the Dancers' Group staff share what they've been up to, linking us to new territories. Andréa writes about getting inspired and energized at the Women of Color in the Arts forum in Atlanta. Danielle examines the frontiers of motherhood—that it's quite an

adjustment in extraordinary and ordinary ways. Alex and Kat take us into the world of combating anti-fatness.

We're also featuring some contributions by recent CA\$H grantees writing about their funded activities. They, too, often write about bridges of different kinds. Their projects and practices span generations, pedagogies, traditions.

Another theme runs through this issue: the practice of being. Conni McKenzie brings the refuge of nature indoors through her immersive exhibition *Flow*. Dia Dear leads us through a *Sick Dance* practice, a practice that involves not "doing" anything. Audrey Johnson explores being in attunement with the land during her artist residency in Georgia.

The ideas in Audrey's essay transported me back to the time I danced on a literal bridge, shown in this photo, from the fall of 2007. I was at an artist residency and spent most of my time taking walks and frolicking in the fields. I produced little in the way of tangible creative outputs but was filled with awe. One of the residency's donors made it clear they were disappointed that I didn't have a finished product. Today, I'm grateful to Audrey and others paving the way for work that challenges our notions of productivity and supports awe and wonder.

Placing my attention on bridging and being, the word *Baying* springs to mind. As in the act of grounding our bridging and being in the Bay. *Baying* is responsive, inclusive, creative. Street dancers, fat dancers, older dancers, disabled dancers—the Bay is finding its way.

What a gift that we live among marvels of construction and culture—pathways to connect us. It was my pleasure to cross over with the writers of this issue. I trust you'll have a similarly expansive experience.

*Rowena*

COURTESY OF ROWENA RICHIE

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Highlights and resources, activities and celebrations for our community – find more on [dancersgroup.org](http://dancersgroup.org)

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Choreography **Jo Kreiter**  
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Set Design **Sean Riley**  
Rigging Design **Dave Freitag**  
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*photo R.J. Muna of Megan Lowe*

# PUTTING DOWN ROOTS & RAISING VOICES

Black Women Leaders at the Dance/USA Conference

by **ANDRÉA SPEARMAN**



**Black people have this unspoken greeting out in public:** the nod. It's an all-ages greeting that can convey many things, from, "Hey, I see you," to, "Let's head out. The environment seems unsafe."

For Black women the nod can lift into a smile and a spoken compliment: "Okay hair!", "Yes yellow dress!" "You betta walk sis!"

Black women are even more affirming to each other as we move through the professional circles of our lives. That is what I experienced at this year's Dance/USA conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

**THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE** was very, very Black. From Dance/USA's fearless leader Kellee Edusei to 4 out of 5 of the extraordinary honorees ([Virginia Johnson](#), [Judy Tyrus](#), [Nena Gilreath](#), [Waverly T. Lucas, II](#)) to the performances throughout the week.

There were innately Black moments. At the opening reception loud rumblings of African drums



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Andréa Spearman is the Dancers' Group Artist Resource Manager and represented Dancers' Group at the Dance/USA conference in June.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANDRÉA SPEARMAN

filled the room. An older Black woman danced across the stage and encouraged us to grab instruments and join in. There were performances by [Ballethnic Dance Company](#) (ballet), [Tap Rebels](#), and [CiCi Kelley](#) (hip hop/street dance).

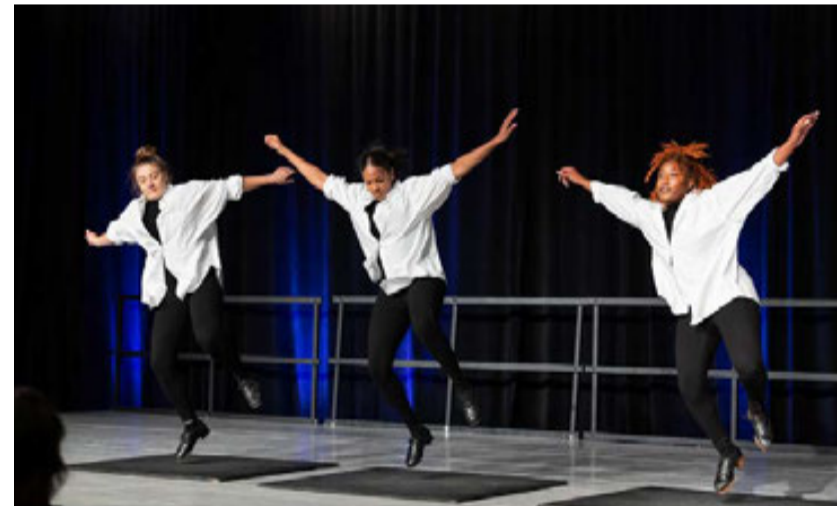
As I watched these performances and heard words of gratitude and honorees' accolades, it dawned on me how many Black women were in the room: in the audience, presenting on stage, being lifted up among their colleagues. For decades of hard work. Would I be one of them one day?

I've been a dance artist since I was a child.

Dance moved from hobby to profession—from my praise dance beginnings, to my current roles as teacher, choreographer, artist resource manager, podcast producer and more.

As I've learned about the business side of dance, I've found more women to be impressed by. Black women founding and leading companies. Making waves in the community.

I picture my name in lights one day, just like them.



**WHEN I HEARD** [Women of Color in the Arts \(WOCA\)](#) would be holding a forum within the Dance/USA conference, I knew this was my chance to meet other Black women working in white-centered spaces, looking to put down roots and raise voices.

WOCA dedicates itself to transformational change in the arts sector. During the forum we lifted up one another's work, reflected on the Dance/USA conference experience, unpacked the experience of being a woman of color in a predominately white industry.

The room was 99% Black women. It felt like a homecoming. There was a moment when a rap battle broke

out and almost everyone started beatboxing, laughing or hyping up the women on each side of the room.

This room held the types of women I'd seen throughout my entire life:

The OGs—the groundbreakers who took those first steps into ballet when society was telling them nobody wanted to see them.

The Troublemakers—women who brought our heritage to the stage front and center and didn't take no for an answer.

The Next Wave—my peers, women who are showing our creativity onstage and at the heads of tables. And bringing our sisters with us.

The crowns that the OGs labored for placed squarely on our heads.

**AS BLACK WOMEN**, our crown is essential to our self image. I looked around the room and saw a diversity of crowns: braids, locs, curls, perms, twist-outs, sew-ins, Afros, presses and waves. Hair as dynamic as our goals.

A question was asked by WOCA director, [Kaisha S. Johnson](#): "What are your dreams and what do you need to make them a reality?"

Dreams ranged from hiring a photographer, to creating a youth program, to expanding a physical space, to creating podcasting networks.

Some dreamers had their needs met right there in the room. Others exchanged business cards and promises to connect for resources. It was a moment of connection and community. Minds coming together to conceive and build an arts community that can rise to its fullest potential.

As I was leaving the conference, filled with pride at such an awesome display of culture and leadership, I wondered again to myself, "Will

I be one of these dynamic wonder women that lead the way and make a change in our community?"

I'm definitely on my way there.

Bay Area native **ANDRÉA SPEARMAN** is an administrator, choreographer, performer, teacher, and student of modern-based movement with over 20 years of experience. Her company [A. Spearman & Co.](#) is a contemporary fusion dance company where artists are trained in ballet, jazz, hip hop, modern, cultural dance, photography, live vocals, poetry, acting, directing, producing and more.

Currently Andréa produces and hosts, [The Black Landscape podcast](#), a series of conversations that spotlight Black people doing significant work in the SF Bay Area.

PHOTO BY SHOCARA MARCUS

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

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# Creating JOY

so that we may remember

KIM REQUESTO INTERVIEWED BY ROWENA RICHIE

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Kim Requesto is a Spring 2023 CA\$H grantee. This article highlights her funded activities and vision.

**ROWENA RICHIE:** You use photography to, “Visually share the realities of Philippine citizens.” Why do you want to share the realities?

**KIM REQUESTO:** When I think of sharing my work with an audience, I hope that everyone, regardless of their race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, can learn, understand, and find connection. There are so many similarities and parallels to our lives, sometimes it takes art in order for us to see and feel it.

**ROWENA:** What stories do you want your photographs to tell?

**KIM:** I want them to remind us that Philippine culture and Filipinos are more than just the trope of lumpia, boxing and mainstream personalities. To remember the power we hold—our identities before colonization, imperialism and western influence.

My photos interact with marginalized and Indigenous communities in the Philippines. Many of those communities are in Mindanao, which is considered an unsafe place because of how it has been portrayed in the media. Being able to share snippets of Mindanao, and different communities that have welcomed me with open arms, is important in combating this narrative and the prejudice that many people have felt.

**ROWENA:** What ethical issues do you face with your photography and dance practices?

**KIM:** Western photography often objectifies Indigenous persons through the lens. It has been important for me to get consent and be cognizant of the language I use surrounding the act of photography. To consider my relationship and connection to the communities as a visitor, but also as a photographer.

I always try to travel with a Polaroid camera to create two photos of a moment: 1 for them, 1 for me. We've seen many times in anthropological photographic history, Indigenous people rarely get to see and hold physical photos of themselves. Additionally, not everyone



PHOTO BY KIM REQUESTO



has the privilege to access technology to be able to see uploaded photos.

I've visited one family since 2015. On my last visit we were able to compare all the photos from the previous years. Connecting over photos is a big part of why I fell in love with photography.

With dance, I involve my mentors and culture bearers. I share movements that have any hint of a cultural practice in them with my mentors so they can collaborate with me.

My director in [Parangal Dance Company](#), Eric Solano, has had such an influence and impact on my practice. Going on research trips with him and being able to observe how he interacts with the different communities has taught me that cultural dance is community work.

**ROWENA:** Your CA\$H-awarded project, *Pasalamat Sa Mga Ina*, translates to “Thanks to the Mothers.” What’s the significance of mothers in a patriarchal world?

**KIM:** Both American and Philippine cultures tend to lean heavy towards patriarchy. However, before colonization in the Philippines, women were regarded highly, even held positions of power. They were regarded as equals. It’s time to reclaim that. To remember the power we hold in the histories of our matriarchal lineage.

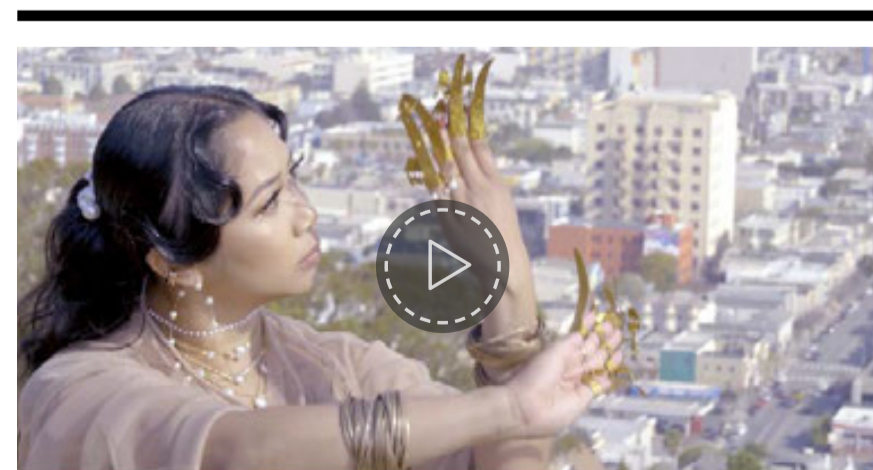
**ROWENA:** Your great lola (grandmother) Juana’s memoir dates back to the 1920s. Nearly 100 years later,

you’re sharing her stories. Why? What’s the connection to *Pasalamat Sa Mga Ina*?

**KIM:** In her memoir, my great lola writes: “*I would like to start writing today interesting events that my beloved ones may enjoy reading about, especially when I am already gone.*” I want to share this drive of hers to create joy for others. This joy is ours to inherit through shared memory.

*Pasalamat Sa Mga Ina* stems from this desire of wanting those we love to be happy. It uplifts and honors this—the act and intention of creating joy so that we may remember.

**ROWENA:** What can younger generations learn from your great lola’s memoir?



PHOTOS BY KIM REQUESTO

**KIM:** The power in our own narratives and our voice. Even in the subtle act of wanting to remember so that those you love remember, too.

**ROWENA:** How do you imagine your legacy inspiring future descendants?

**KIM:** I hope it inspires folks to archive our personal histories, create more Filipinx diasporic work, and keep to the tradition of passing down our families’ legacies.

**ROWENA:** You describe yourself as a “Philippine born, Mission District-raised Cultural Worker.” As a cultural worker how do you balance empowering marginalized communities of Filipinos with raising awareness outside of the Filipinx community?

**KIM:** When it comes to cultural work, it’s important to remember that our work intersects with so many different cultures and communities. Dance and photography that uplifts marginalized communities of Filipinos has given cultural entry points to audience members. By sharing my art and speaking on it, I uplift those Indigenous communities while educating others.

**ROWENA:** How can we in the broader Bay Area dance community help you?

**KIM:** Create more funding opportunities for artists to continue to be able to share and create their work! More opportunities to collaborate with other artists to showcase what we can and have been doing.

**ROWENA:** Anything else you want to add?

**KIM:** Parangal Dance Company is having our 15th Anniversary show, *Paglinang*, soon. I’ve been teaching senior citizens Philippine Folk Dance for the past few weeks as part of a SOMA Pilipinas program called Restorative Theater Arts for Seniors (RETAS) and they’ll be performing!

### **Paglinang**

[Parangal and SOMA Pilipinas](#)

Saturday, October 7, 2023

2 PM and 7 PM

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**KIM REQUESTO** is a Philippine born, Mission District-raised Cultural Worker and Interdisciplinary Artist based in San Francisco, California. With an artistic foundation in Philippine folk dance that spans over 18 years, Requesto has dedicated herself to cultural expression and advocacy through movement, photography, and community outreach. Requesto is currently with Parangal Dance as part of their Artistic Team.



# THE CYPHER, THE CIRCLE & THE DRUMS

by KARLA FLORES



PHOTOS BY (TOP AND RIGHT) GLADYS LIU, (BOTTOM) KIBAZI PLUS



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Karla Flores is a Spring 2023 CA\$H grantee. This article highlights her funded activities and vision.

**A**froRooted is something new. And at the same time, has existed long before the name was even created. It is holding up hip hop culture, and tracing its roots back to the drum. The first code.

It is recognizing the births and histories of these freestyle dances, and asking, “What more is there? Outside of the Black and Brown communities that catapulted house, waacking, breakin, rock dance, turfin and vogue into battles and onto world stages?”

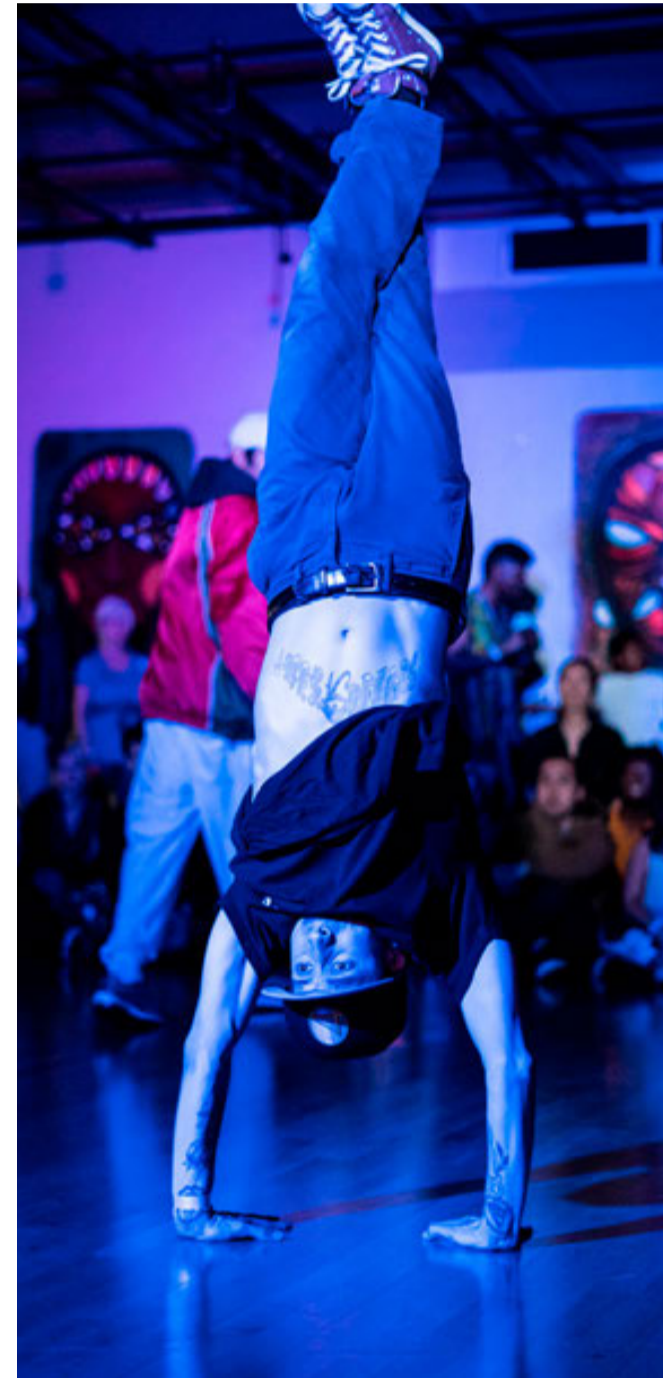
The circle, the cypher (or cipher), existed long before these freestyle art forms began. This is not to generalize, more to emphasize that AfroRooted has been done several times over and over. The “cypher” existed in traditional dances from indigenous communities telling stories through movement. Honoring ancestors and connecting to Earth.

Lilian Maxmillian Nabaggala and me, Karla “Karlita” Flores, two women active in choreographic work, battles, performance and community organizing, met officially back in 2015 through the State Department cultural network, [Next Level](#)—an international hip hop diplomacy initiative. Meeting in Kampala, Uganda, we connected through our love of the dance style waacking. We learned each others’ teachings from freestyle and traditional movements. Some of these sessions would take place on hostel rooftops in Kampala.

AfroRooted is the continued “conversation” between dances from the African diaspora and the freestyle dances of today. It officially launched in 2019, forging a new community of Bay Area folks from the competitive street dance world and the traditional African dance world.



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**THE CYPHER, WHERE WE TELL OUR STORIES...THE CONNECTIONS AND EXCHANGES WE DO IN "BATTLES" AND "CYPHERING," IT'S ALL INTERCONNECTED.**

In 2020, AfroRooted evolved further, forming partnerships with [Afrobeats Oakland](#), [Elements](#) and [Dimensions Dance Theater](#). The festival was held at the historic Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts, a major cultural arts center and home to many African diasporic dance companies and master teachers such as Diamouna Coura

West African Dance Company, SambaFunk! and Fua Dia Congo. The format was set as a 2 v. 2 open styles battle format danced to Afrohouse, afrobeats and other genres from Africa. The cyphers happened in between the battles and the event wrapped up with live African drumming. During those two years, AfroRooted became a healing

PHOTOS BY IVY-CHEN

and celebratory multi-ethnic, multi-generational festival. As Dance/USA Fellow and guest judge [Muisi-kongo Malonga](#) said in 2019, "Drum is the first code and these dances, these movements, have been done before."

The third installment of AfroRooted is set for spring 2024 in Oakland, California. It will follow a similar format as before, with a community "battle" exploring the question of where our freestyle dances evolved from? What happens when we strip down genres to the foundational drum patterns? How can we connect what was done to what is still practiced today, to how these freestyle

forms continue to evolve? The cypher, where we tell our stories...the connections and exchanges we do in "battles" and "cyphering," it's all interconnected. And more importantly, how the drum is the first code.

**KARLA "KARLITA" FLORES** is a dancer, community leader, and DJ based in Oakland, California. Breakin was her first entry into the dance world and since then she has explored other styles such as rock dance, waacking and salsa. She's traveled internationally as a dance mentor with All The Way Foundation, and as a hip hop cultural diplomat with Next Level. Through her creativity, she always centers her roots from Nicaragua and the Bay Area.

PHOTOS BY  
ROBBIE SWEENEY

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** inkBoat, founded by Shinichi Iova-Koga, is a CA\$H Dance Spring 2023 grantee. This article outlines their funded activities and vision.

The impetus for *Clouds from a Crumbling Giant* was my father, moving into a sudden decline. I witnessed him crumbling. I watched the strong and capable man I grew up with rapidly change. His vigor diminished dramatically; his clarity of mind slowly faded away. What I observed came into conflict with my long-held ideas of him. I had trouble accepting who I saw him becoming.

Some weeks ago, he died. Now I'm left with his patterns, his influences... and somehow this study of my father has turned into self-study. Perhaps that was always the case, and I've only just realized it.

As with the creation of most inkBoat works, the personal experience extends into the process, no matter what the theme might be. In this case, the product/process/personal intertwine into some symbiotic fusion where life and art prove difficult to separate.

# PREPARING THE CLOUDS

BY SHINICHI IOVA-KOGA



*Clouds* involves multi-generational, racially diverse, cross-disciplinary communities. They each bring perspective to the table, and fold a vibrant and essential layer into the growing life of the work. As director and performer, I sit in the center... literally and functionally. In that position I am guided by many forces: my father, the stories and experiences of the other elders we've interviewed for the project, the artistry of the musicians and performers, and the circulation practices shared by [David Wei of Wudang West Cultural Center](#). Being at the locus of all this

**My role within the project involves a balancing act between my ego, obeying the logic of the moment, listening and providing structure.**

means receiving lots of information. And sending something back. And trusting the outcome. Letting go.

The idea of “letting go” lives within the artistic process of *Clouds*. I invite collaborators or conditions to change the artistic work. The challenge resides in the balance of chaos and structure. Too far one way or the other results in either an over-controlled, sterile

aesthetic... or a mess. My role within the project involves a balancing act between my ego, obeying the logic of the moment, listening and providing structure. Even a cloud has structure.

We're a year and a half into a very long development and research process that began in 2022 and will continue through 2025 and likely beyond. To date, we've performed

PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

works in progress at UC Davis, TanzFest in Luzern, Switzerland, the San Francisco International Arts Festival, and the Seattle International Dance Festival. We're building up the strata of perspectives. One collaborator, musician Jon Raskin, had this to say about one of our scores:

*The sticks are pushing Shinichi into shapes and patterns, and he grabs them and pulls them in a call-and-response type of interaction. The musicians only respond to the particular dancers they are assigned to. What's fascinating is that it appears*

*that Shinichi's movement is being determined by the dancers and musicians, but in actuality Shinichi is conducting the movement between himself and the dancers with the sticks, in dialogue with the musicians. It is a conducted improvisation where everyone has agency.*

This push and pull operates both as part of the stage work, and within the inner workings of the collaboration, the process. The heart receives and gives.

On stage, I embody a crumbling, elderly person. Jon asks me: “Is your old man... your old man?” My old

man is me. Or everybody. My father said, “Don't make me an old man!”

Acceptance doesn't come easily. In this inquiry, I'm practicing for death... which I hope meets me far, far down the road. Until that time, I believe this process and practice will enrich my life. I hope it will bring value to others.

**SHINICHI IOVA-KOGA** serves as the Artistic Director of the dance theater company inkBoat. He studies, practices and teaches Daoist Internal Arts (such as Dao Yin and Qi Gong). He is the editor of the book *95 Rituals*, a tribute to Anna Halprin, and a contributing writer to *The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance*. He is featured in the book *Butoh America*. More at [inkboat.com](http://inkboat.com)



# FLOW

Embracing Nature's Wisdom Through Art

by CONNI MCKENZIE | photo by BAY CHACONAS

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Conni McKenzie is a Spring 2023 CA\$H grantee. This article highlights her funded activities and vision.

Imagine you are walking along a long winding path, stretching for miles, over hills and through forests. As you finally settle into a comfortable spot, you pause to take a deep, refreshing breath of air. In that moment you realize something profound—you can breathe deeply, and you have nowhere else to be. You can tackle challenges, but you can also find solace in rest. Right here, right now, you're fully present in this moment, and this moment is just for you. These are a few lessons I've learned from my encounters with nature.

*Flow* originated from two primary motivations. First and foremost, it was born out of my yearning to establish deeper alignment in my daily life. Second, I desired to converge my dance and digital practice into something that concretely expressed what mattered to me.

Outside of dance practice, I thoroughly enjoy outdoor travel and have documented my experiences through photography and video. Over the course of several years I have developed an archive of thousands of photos, videos and stories from around the world. But 99% of what I have captured has never been shared with anyone. *Flow* aims to reveal a portion of these archives, coupled with accompanying narratives and an integrated sound design.

*Flow* is an immersive experience that offers a meditative journey uniquely designed by and with Black people in mind—an uncommon occurrence in the art world. While *Flow* can offer something to everyone, it's important to recognize that conventional narratives about nature frequently omit the experiences of Black individuals. It's essential to remember that all people can benefit from connecting with nature, and this project emphasizes that perspective.

*Flow* also aims to bridge the gap between nature and those who may seldom experience it. The broader context of access to nature in North America, particularly in relation to our colonial history and resulting disparities, underpins the project's aspiration: to immerse individuals, especially those with limited access or transportation challenges, in the therapeutic embrace of nature.

*Flow* will unfold within a three-room exhibit, delving into digital immersion through the mediums of photography, video and sound. Visitors will have the opportunity to settle in comfortably while contemplating thought-provoking prompts displayed throughout the exhibit. Additionally, on five evenings I will be joined by three talented performers for a unique premiere of *Flow*, integrating dance performances and engaging dialogues that encourage audiences to consider how they can invite more flow into their lives.

I invite people to come to the exhibit to discover something new about themselves. In the midst of urban life, our exhibit offers a unique opportunity to compress the profound effects of extended time in

nature into a brief yet impactful experience. As the Artistic Director, my goal is to create a space where everyone can find their own meaning. I appreciate the diversity of attendees and their varied perspectives, as they bring richness and depth to the project's overall impact.

Nature serves as a powerful reminder of our capacity for stillness and vitality, as well as the inherent impermanence of existence. Water, in particular, emerges as a symbol that links us to our inner workings



*Nature serves as a powerful reminder of our capacity for stillness and vitality, as well as the inherent impermanence of existence.*

and the intricate chaos of life itself. Through the *Flow* exhibition and performances, my aim is to introduce individuals to these concepts and, for those who already possess a connection, further deepen their understanding of the interplay between our inner flow and the flow of nature.

#### **Flow Exhibition & Performance**

October 4th-15th, 2023  
Paul Dresher Studio  
2201 Poplar Street  
Oakland, California 94607  
Tickets for *Flow* can be purchased [here](#).

Follow the project at [flowexhibition.connimckenzie.com](#).

**CONNIE MCKENZIE** is a versatile dancer from the New York metropolitan area. Her award-winning film, "Set Me Free," was featured in the 2021 San Francisco Dance Film Festival, and she has directed several other shorts that have been showcased internationally.

Conni is currently a resident artist with New Performance Traditions as part of the Dresher Ensemble Artist Residency (D.E.A.R.) and with BoxoPROJECTS. [@lady\\_dancelot](#)

PHOTOS BY (LEFT) DANNY HERNANDEZ, (ABOVE) FELICITAS FISCHER

# WHY THE HELLA HYPHY BALL IS MORE THAN JUST A BALL

by TREMAINE WHEATON

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Oakland to All is a Spring 2023 CA\$H grantee. This article highlights their funded activities and vision.

**O**

**AKLAND TO ALL** began in June 2021 as a meeting of the minds. Three ballroom participants wanted to create a safe space for queer youth during the pandemic—at a time when ballroom had begun to wane in the Bay Area. We came together and hosted free, renegade vogue sessions out-

side at Lake Merritt Pergola. Through the work of Shea 007, Ashlee Basquiat, and myself, and our regular collaboration with venues Public Works and Fluid510, Oakland to All is becoming more than just a safe space for ballroom participants to express their authentic selves. It's becoming a hub for ballroom experience.

Ballroom is a whole culture. It can't be summarized just by dance, though expressing one's self through music and vogue is intrinsic to ballroom. At balls even those who don't "walk" vogue categories—who don't compete—vogue on the sidelines, vogue at home with friends, vogue

at clubs outside of balls. Those who are a part of the culture have that ingrained in them. We express ourselves through movement significantly more than our words. Even in non-dancing categories like Runway or Face, movement is key.

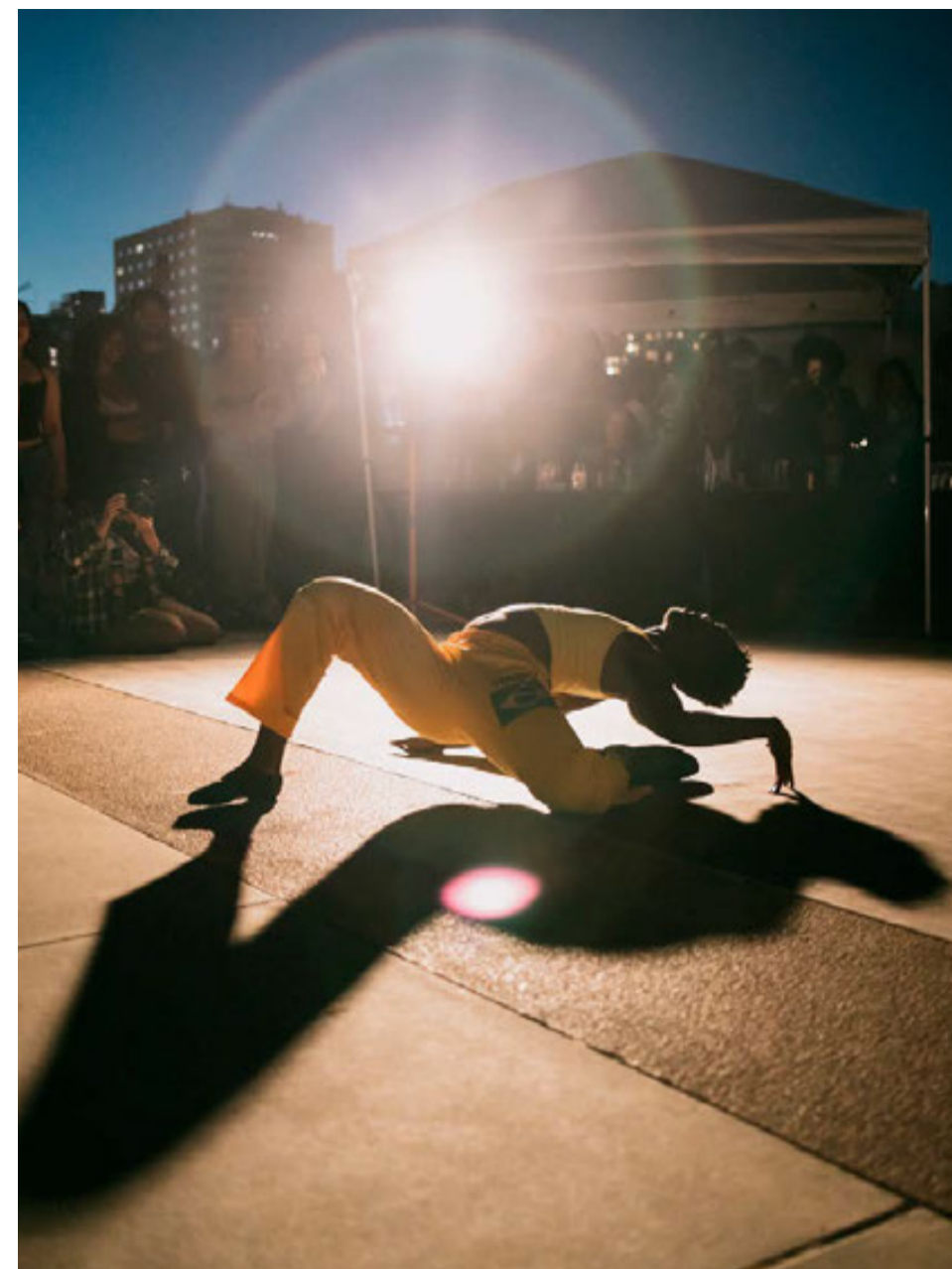
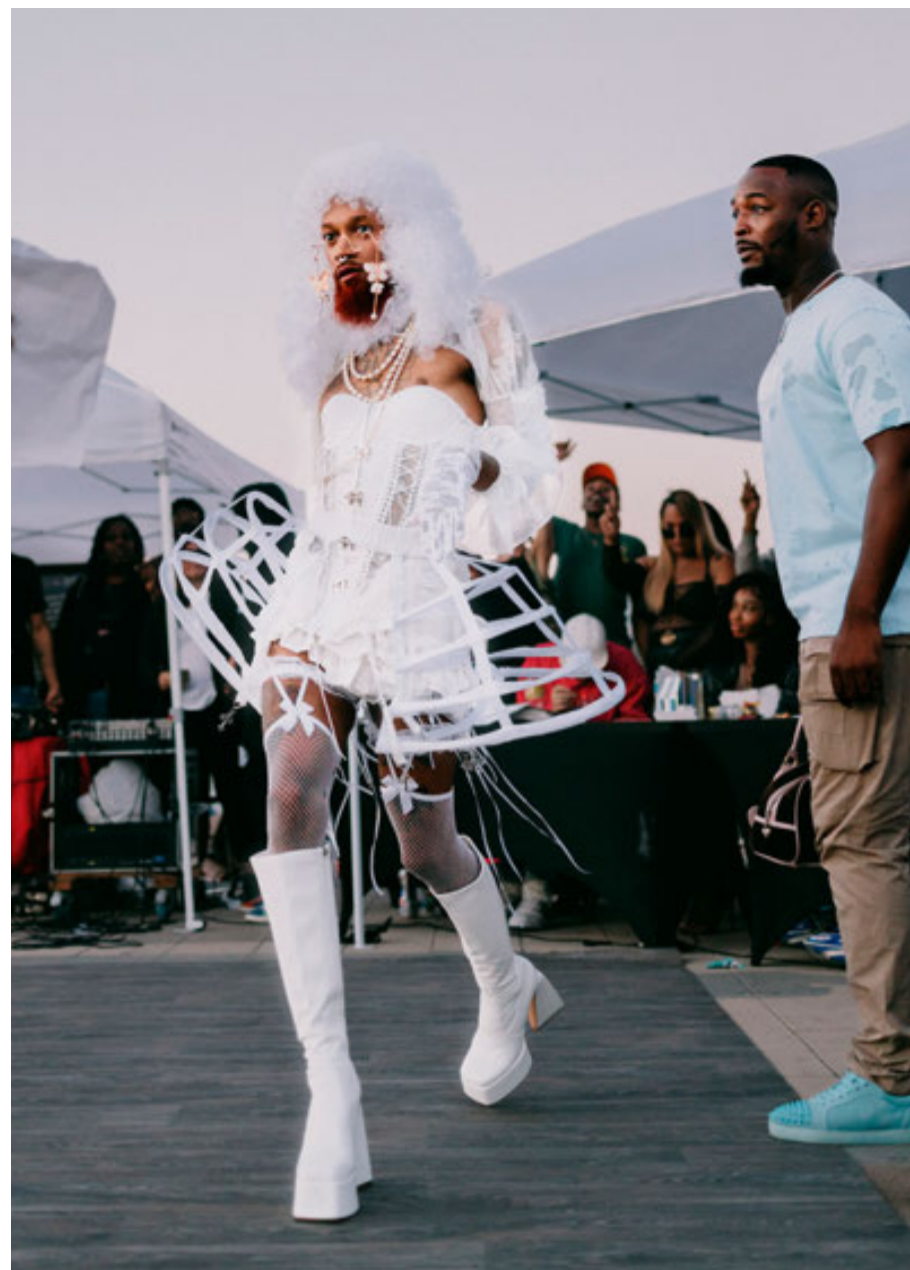
In addition to hosting balls and parties we hold classes for ballroom participants to learn to vogue or to walk Runway. Oakland to All also always tries to give back to the community. We regularly book ballroom participants for paid gigs as they vibe up, like performing on the main stage at San Francisco and Oakland Prides and participating in the annual Gilead Pride event. Furthermore, we offer some free events, like our annual Hella Hyphy Ball held during Oakland Pride weekend at the Lake Merritt Amphitheater.

We always wanted to throw a ball that celebrates the Bay Area as a whole: its culture, its landmarks, the people. One of the most significant cultural movements for the Bay Area was the Hyphy movement.

The Hyphy Era is a moment in time from the late '90s to the mid 2000s where the Bay Area was having a sort of Hip Hop renaissance. It bred a new sound, new dance moves like "going dumb," and opened the world up to artists like E-40 and Mac Dre. Hyphy energy still permeates through Bay Area natives like us, from the slang we use, to the way we dance, and was a key influence in



PHOTO BY RANDY LUCINA



many of us coming of age. Even now, Bay Area music, dances, culture still radiate Hyphy influence.

So, when we decided to move forward with the idea, Hella Hyphy was an obvious choice for our ball's name. This was a chance to "put on" for the Bay Area, and by that I mean celebrate where we're from.

This year was our second go-round hosting the Hella Hyphy Ball (September 9th, 2023), made possible by a few sponsors, including the CASH Dance grant. Part ballroom experience, part educational tool, we also utilize the ball to educate about Bay Area historic moments and people. Our category sheet—which is a flier that ballroom promoters release ahead of a ball so that participants know how to prepare for the respective categories—reads much more like a booklet of fun Bay Area facts than a vogue category sheet.

Both years we've kicked off the event with Bay Area trivia and guest Bay Area rappers: Keak da Sneak last year, who is the person who actually coined the term Hyphy, and Stunnaman and DJ Westcoast this year. Both shows featured some of the best turf dancers from the Bay. (Turfing being a Bay Area dance style that takes its influence from Tutting, bone breaking and gliding). We continue this pre-show tradition because we always want to book and promote artists from the community, and ensure that people from out of town get to see the Bay the way we do.

The Hella Hyphy Ball has also bridged the gap between the hip hop and the queer community, and created a space where everyone can share freely.

Currently, everything publicized about the Bay Area is bad: robberies, shootings, smash-and-grabs. Safe communal spaces, like the Hella Hyphy Ball, are forgotten. Bay Area excellence is forgotten. This year Kamala Harris inspired one of our vogue categories. Though she may be polarizing to some, she is the FIRST EVER Black and Asian American female Vice President of the United States. And she's from Oakland. That is HISTORIC, as are many social movements that have occurred here, like the creation of the Black Panther Party. We've created vogue categories inspired by Bay Area sports teams, Lake Merritt, Oscar Grant, Keyshia Cole, Too Short, Marshawn Lynch, the Thizzle Dance and more. We always want to celebrate Bay Area culture with the Hella Hyphy Ball.

**OAKLAND TO ALL** is a collaborative that seeks to foster an inclusive space for the ballroom community of the Bay Area and its surroundings. The ballroom scene is primarily comprised of Black and Latino LGBTQ+ individuals—communities that continue to be underserved. Our collaborative creates an inclusive atmosphere for LGBTQ+ Black and Brown folks and their allies to express themselves in a fun, safe and creative way. Access to resources and links to care are established through our partnership with local LGBTQ+ community based organizations. [@oaklandtoall](https://oaklandtoall.com)

PHOTO BY RANDY LUCINA



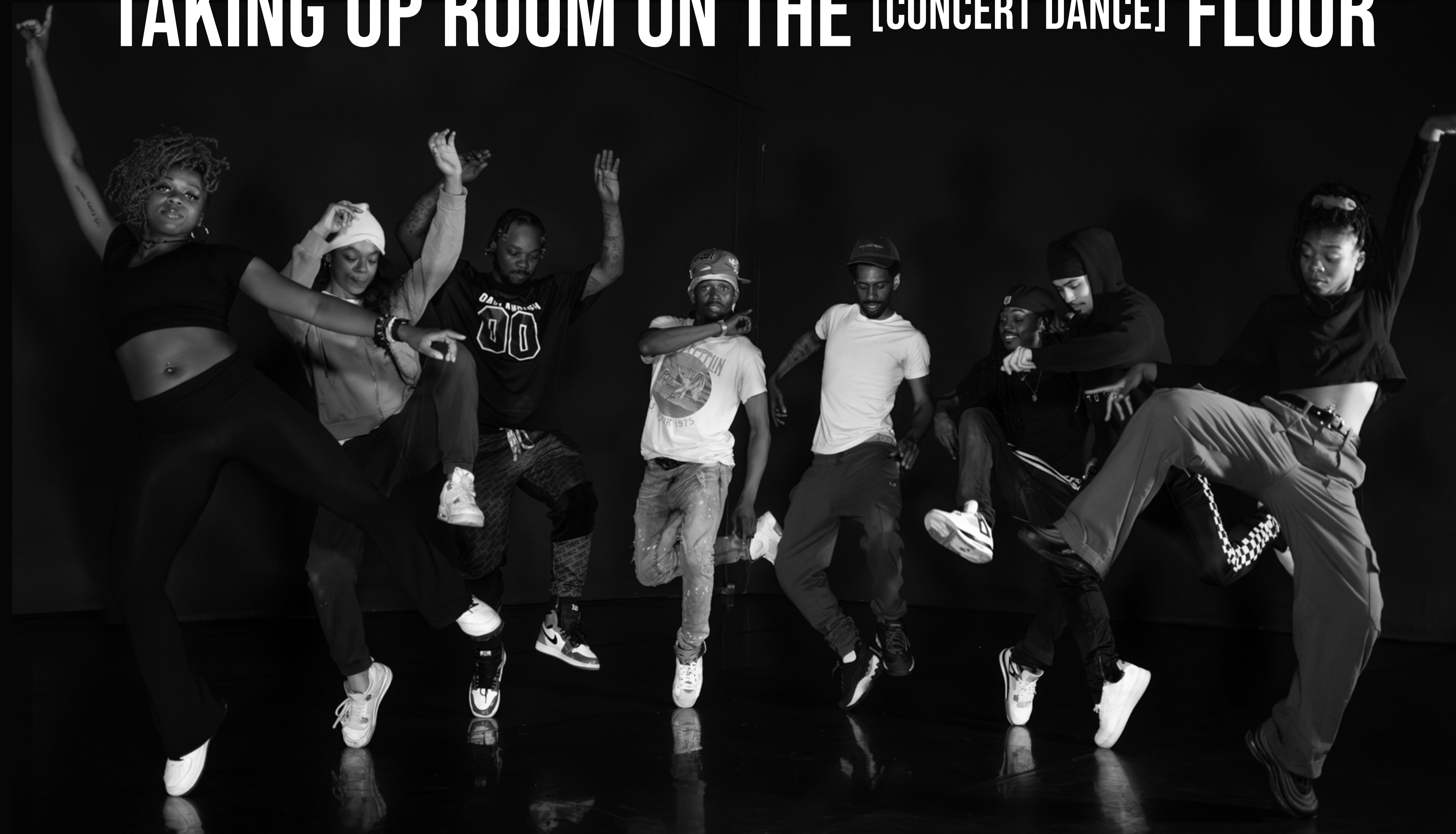
*Strengthening Communities.  
Catalyzing Inclusion.  
Cultivating Belonging.*

MOSAICAMERICA.ORG



BY MELISSA HUDSON BELL | PHOTOS BY MY-LINH LE

# TAKING UP ROOM ON THE [CONCERT DANCE] FLOOR





“IT’S A LIVE PERFORMANCE in the form of a mockumentary that takes place in 2032,” begins My-Linh Le, creative director of Mud Water Theatre. “At this time, the turfing community is having to find a way to preserve their dance form, and their culture, and the way they do this is by teaching an AI called Dance GPT everything that they can.”

At my prompting, Le is describing her company’s upcoming full-length theatrical dance piece, which will premiere at Dance Mission Theater Nov 17, 18 and 19, 2023. The answer launches us into conversation about belonging, and about strategies for cultivating and sustaining a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing world.

This is not surprising, I suppose, considering who Mud Water is. Le identifies primarily as a popper and is

a member of the legendary popping crew [Playboyz Inc.](#) The company is comprised entirely of Turf dancers from across the Bay. Turfing, as readers may know, grew out of 1960s boogaloo culture and is one of the main components of the Hyphy movement that emerged in the early 2000s. Many locals may be familiar with Turfing from rapper E-40’s music [videos](#), or a 2008 viral video “[RIP Rich D](#)” featuring the Turf Feinz dancing in the rain at the corner of Macarthur and 90th. It is an expressive form often characterized by a dancer’s bounce and playful style, seen by some as stylistically representing the Bay’s embrace of individuality, buoyant energy and general vibe. These are attributes, Le notes, that haven’t always been fully legible to national audiences.

This seems to have made claiming spaces and places of belonging especially important to Le, who herself feels the tension of her insider/outsider status in relation to Turfing. While she doesn’t identify as a Turfer, she is passionate about the preservation and visibility of the style, and is staging the upcoming piece as a theatricalized response to forces she sees negatively changing the ecology of the street dance scene in the past few years (ahem, Red Bull).

The dancers she has selected to perform can be seen on socials performing in the places Bay Area folks have come to expect to see the homegrown style of Turfing happening – in the dancers’ own homes, on BART station trains and platforms, on city sidewalks with traffic flowing by. Many of the dancers have also performed in the competition



circuit, which pits Turfers and other street dancers against one another in (mostly) friendly competition. By signing on with Le, however, these dancers are taking on Mud Water’s explicit project of theatricalizing Turfing for the concert dance stage.

When I propose that this theatricalization of the form may also be changing the ecology of the street dance scene, and subsequently question if she and the dancers receive pushback from the community for performing in the theater, Le is quick to assert the act as something in line with the ethos of the form. “Turfing is highly adaptable. We are constantly creating in whatever space we’re given.”

Le explains that she views Turfing’s taking up of space on the concert dance floor not so much a shift in what Turfing is, but rather an exemplification of how Turfing can assert its belonging in different performance spaces. “I personally don’t think of the theater as a space that Turfing has to adapt itself to, it’s more like I’m trying to adapt the theater to turfing.”

The ways in which the company intends to do this in its upcoming performances are still in process. Will the audience judge a battle? Will there be a dance battle with audience members invited to compete? While the methods are TBD, the message is unabashedly, ‘Turfing belongs here.’

**Mud Water Theatre x Dance Mission Theater present**

[Mud Water IV](#)

Fri-Sun, Nov 17-19

**MELISSA HUDSON BELL** is a founder of Who Knows Best Productions, based in Oakland, CA, and the Executive Vice President of WKB Industries. She is a choreographer, teacher, performer and scholar. Hudson Bell earned her MFA in Experimental Choreography and her PhD in Critical Dance Studies from UC Riverside. She has taught at UC Berkeley, University of San Francisco and Santa Clara University, where she was an artist-in-residence. She has written for various publications including the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *In Dance*.

# Weaving the Generations Together Through “QUILTED ANCESTORS”

by DAZAUN SOLEYN



to the creative process that is currently being co-led by Liv, Dance Generators Director and me, Artistic Director of [dazaun.dance](http://dazaun.dance) and Dance Generators Guest Artist.

The upright, intricately woven sculptures were created by textile and visual artist [Adia Millett](#). Adia has woven four large-scale quilts outlined with 12-inch feathers which are draped over 6-foot tall mannequins. The draping of the fabric brings these multi-patterned quilts to life creating ghost-like figures in the space. These quilted ancestors represent both

the four elements—earth, wind, fire and air—and viewers’ ancestors as etheric beings. They are part of Millett’s larger exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art San Jose, [Wisdom Keepers](#).

For the opening of *Wisdom Keepers* we will engage in a variety of partnerships: human + human; human + quilted ancestor; human + quilted ancestor + human. Gestures and phrases are built in relation to the sculptures and grounded in the rhythmic syncopation and groove of house dance, and in reverence to the four symbolic ancestors.

## **Wisdom Keepers explores the parallels and interplays between a craftswoman and a warrior**

*Wisdom Keepers* explores the parallels and interplays between a craftswoman and a warrior.

One parallel between a craftswoman and a warrior informing our creative process is the intention of protecting, preserving and building a community and culture; one that both holds sacred the teachings of our ancestors, and makes those teachings fluid and relevant to our day to day lives. Through discourse and imagination we explore how a healthy relationship with an ancestral presence can be reciprocal and ongoing. In some ways these modes of questioning point to an aspect of the soul that is the creative collaboration between Liv and myself.

**THROUGHOUT 2023**, Liv and I built work and co-facilitated communal processes with members of the [Dance Generators](#), a group of dancers that range in age from 18 to 91 years old. These creative rituals held the simple, yet extremely potent intention of working together to build bridges in a world divided by cultures, ancestry, systematic oppression, biases and generational differences. We have found that these communal spaces

release deep-rooted emotions and generational trauma held within the body. Moving forward, Liv and I are both clear that the next step for us is to extend the invitation to these intergenerational, intentional spaces to members of our community beyond the Dance Generators network. Through the funding of the CASH grant we are beginning to investigate what that expansion looks like.

We are in the early stages of a new project that will feature three Black and three white artists. In addition to Liv and myself we are working with composers Jordan Dapney and Max Judelson, and the remaining two artists will be older adults. This work will experiment with communal processes and methods that bridge generational, cultural and racial divides while examining and interrupting the whiteness that anchors creative aging opportunities in the Bay Area.

When I think of the lack of creative aging opportunities for Black Folks I think of my grandmother/ancestor Louise Langston. I can close my eyes and be transported back to her apartment in Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY where I hear her telling me stories of how she dreamed of becoming a fashion designer. She could envision designs and she knew she had a creative gift within her. However, she



didn’t have access to creative aging spaces like Dance Generators, and she didn’t have the resources to fully express that part of herself. I imagine that the work, spaces, partnerships—the resources that Liv and I will generate through our collaboration—will give elders like my grandmother opportunities to live out their wildest creative dreams.

Even though my grandmother is an ancestor in the spiritual realm, I will continue to give her spirit the space to be as creative as she wishes. This intergenerational collaboration is a practice of multidimensional healing for me. I am excited to continue to brainstorm, improvise, play, experiment with physical material and share space with Liv. To discover ways to do our bridge work with a sense of reverence, responsibility and respect for our ever-changing communities.

With an intention to create art that aims to illuminate the human soul, **DAZAUN SOLEYN** (he/she/they), has presented work in the Bay Area since 2013. He received a BFA in Modern Dance Performance and Choreography from the University of South Florida and continued his dance education at the Alonzo King LINES Ballet Training Program. Recently, Dazaun graduated from California College of the Arts with a Masters in Architecture (MArch). Dazaun is a professor at the University of San Francisco, a Gyrotonic Instructor, Reiki Master and Apprentice Herbalist. His mediums include dance, architecture, sculpture and interactive installations. [dazaunsoleyn.org](http://dazaunsoleyn.org)

PHOTOS BY HILARY GOBELL, (RIGHT) SHAWN ROBERTS



# SPACING UP

**A conversation between two dancers combating anti-fatness**

BY KAT KOENEMANN AND ALEX TISCARENO

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Kat Koenemann is Dancers' Group's General Manager and Alex Tiscareno is a Dancers' Group Administrative Assistant. Their paths crossed through their fat-positive advocacy.

**KAT:** I'm so excited we're working together at Dancers' Group. It's wonderful to meet another dancer/teacher in a bigger body who is also making space for bigger bodies in dance. I identify as a fat dancer. I use "fat" in a neutral, even positive way, and it's been liberating. The word can carry a lot of weight (pun intended), but our discomfort with the word "fat" can be illuminating!

PHOTO BY GINGER FIENSTEIN

**ALEX:** It's really nice to see dancers who have a similar body type to me. I've always identified as plus-size or bigger-bodied. More recently, I opened up to describing myself as a fat dancer once I started my thesis work, which, as you know, was about how anti-fatness affects the dancing body.

**KAT:** That is such important work! I have also shifted from body positivity and trying to "love my body" to confronting anti-fatness and seeing the bigger picture: ALL bodies deserve respect regardless of size, skin color, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, age, health or

ability status. It's not just about self-love, it's about human rights. We've been treating fat people terribly, and weight-stigma intersects with other marginalizations to keep people disempowered.

**ALEX:** Absolutely! For a long time I hated my body because of the hatred I experienced in dance spaces; it took its toll. During my research, I read the book *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness* by Da'Shaun L. Harrison. In it, they reject this idea that loving yourself will solve anti-fatness. They describe the body-positivity movement as a mask to the violent idea of thinness, robbing us of fat liberation. This stuck with me.

**KAT:** We're told to love ourselves, but with conditions!

**ALEX:** Exactly! Dancers are subjected to high rates of disordered eating, so as I worked through my own relationship with food and my body, I began to examine my own internalized fat-phobia. It made me want to share the stories of myself and others, which is why I opted to use interviews of dancers in bigger bodies within my thesis work. Fat dancers often are discredited when we draw from the fatphobic treatment we've received. I wanted to show that this treatment is still prevalent within the dance community. It's great to connect with you, because you are actively fighting for fat liberation and joy in dance. Can you say more about what you do?

**KAT:** I teach weekly classes at [Hipline](#) studio in Oakland. They are low impact, high energy, follow-along dance classes that center expression and joy. I'm also the studio's Body Empowerment Consultant, helping our studio follow through on our commitment to combat anti-fatness and empower bodies of all shapes and sizes.

**ALEX:** That is wonderful!

**KAT:** I also teach a monthly dance class for fat-identified folks called Big Thick Energy, which started in July of 2022. I was afraid no one would show up, but every class has been packed, with a waitlist! One thing is clear: there are so many fat people who want to dance, but need shame-free spaces where they are respected and celebrated. The class has been such a joyful and healing space. It's been transformative for the dance studio. We now have more body diversity in all the classes. It's beautiful!

**ALEX:** I completely agree. We need more dance spaces that actively commit to making this radical transformation. Da'Shaun L. Harrison writes, "In order to destroy anti-fatness and anti-Blackness, we must destroy Desire, Beauty, Thinness and Whiteness." They are referring to the meaning that society assigns to each of these words and who benefits from them—white, cis-gendered, thin and able-bodied individuals. In order to advance body inclusivity within the dance field we have to destroy this oppressive system and reimagine a world where everyone is valued equally.

Sabrina Strings wrote a book called *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* where she talks about how fat phobia is rooted in racism against Black bodies, particularly Black women. *The Black Dancing Body*, written by Brenda Dixon Gottschild, dives deeper into how this manifests and affects Black dancing bodies. These authors and texts have been crucial in my fat liberation advocacy work. I am a queer, white Latina who has been treated horribly because of the size and shape of my body. Still, it will never come close to the severity that Black and Brown bodies go through on a daily basis. My work is only scratching the surface and is only my perspective,

which is still very privileged comparatively.

**KAT:** These are essential resources. I also have privilege as a white, cis-gendered, mostly able-bodied person. Even my relative size as a 2x/3x woman gives me privilege over larger fat folks. We should all be listening to and learning from people in the most marginalized bodies. Larger fat, Black, Brown, Indigenous, Disabled and Queer activists have been doing this work for a long time.

**ALEX:** Absolutely.

**KAT:** It's not a coincidence that the most anti-fatness I've experienced in dance has been in very White spaces, where the emphasis was on perfectionism, uniformity, and strict technique—all values rooted in White supremacy. A big part of this work is re-evaluating what we merit in dance. I don't want to see dancers that look exactly alike with the same body type and technique. I want to see authenticity, creativity, embodiment, joy and expression.

**ALEX:** I'm glad you mentioned embodiment. There is this big push in the dance community for more embodied practices like somatics, a field of movement practices that emphasizes internal physical perception and experience. However, when you look at who is getting credit for this idea, it's white individuals. These practices are not new. Black, Indigenous and other People of Color have been practicing "embodiment" for centuries. Dance has given us a "codified" method of healing but it is still a luxury that is afforded to white, cis-gendered, able-bodied individuals. I've written about how I think this could be radically overhauled in my thesis. What have you noticed in your work about how we, as individuals who benefit from this system, can begin to dismantle it?

# ALL BODIES DESERVE RESPECT REGARDLESS OF SIZE, SKIN COLOR, ETHNIC BACKGROUND, GENDER, SEXUALITY, AGE, HEALTH OR ABILITY STATUS.



PHOTO BY ALENNA JOY PHOTOGRAPHY

**KAT:** Wow. That is real. “Embodiment” should be our natural state! In a capitalist system so much is taken and sold back to people. Our bodies become projects that are never complete, and the powerful tool that disempowers us from opting out of these systems is shame. It’s overwhelming to fight an entire system, but we can begin with ourselves. We start by unlearning the idea that some bodies are more valuable or morally better than others.

In a dance studio, owners, directors, teachers, choreographers, and staff need to be doing intentional work to challenge their own biases, including anti-fat bias, as well as offering resources and training for staff and

dancers. In addition, a crucial safety measure for all movement spaces is to educate about eating disorders. They are more common and dangerous than folks realize, and they affect people of all sizes.

I strongly suggest keeping diet-talk and negative body talk out of the dance space. Conversations about personal eating choices (weight-centric or not) can be reserved for elsewhere. Any body talk that uplifts certain bodies or characteristics over others shouldn’t be allowed, including comments about oneself. It’s understandable to have critical thoughts about our bodies, but these should be processed privately, with consent—let’s keep it out of dance space.

**ALEX:** This type of talk is prevalent!

**KAT:** It is everywhere! I take a trauma-aware approach. I assume anyone entering my class may have trauma related to their body image—especially fat folks. So I go out of my way to emphasize non-judgement, to center the dancers’ experience. I provide options for dancers to customize movement to their body and remind them that they are the owners and executors of their own body.

As we look at our dance spaces through this lens, we can ask: Who is not here, and why? Are the movements accessible or adaptable? Is there fat-friendly seating in the studio? Is the building accessible? Are the costumes or merchandise available in inclusive sizing? Is there body-diversity in marketing materials? Are there other types of diversity in the space (ethnicity, race, gender expression, sexuality, age, ability)? Will people of all shapes and sizes feel comfortable and included?

Our society is anti-fat, so our spaces will be, too, unless we work on it. We won’t be perfect, but we should start somewhere.

**ALEX:** I was “raised” in modern and contemporary performance spaces, so these values hold a lot of weight to me. I was always told that because I was fat, I would never be a professional dancer or that I would make companies look “trashy.” I was encouraged to get weight loss surgery and graphically told how disordered eating would benefit me and make me “hireable.” Even in the Bay Area, people have told me that not all inclusion is good inclusion and that “fat dancers just can’t do what other dancers can do.”

**KAT:** First of all, I am so sorry those things were said to you.



It’s unacceptable. I’m glad it didn’t stop you from dancing because we both know that fat dancers absolutely CAN dance.

**ALEX:** Yes! That is why I’ve pulled my focus more towards the performance side of dance. You don’t often see larger dancers on stage, working with professional companies, or getting recognized by notable choreographers. Someone once told me that they saw a “bigger dancer” dancing for Bill T. Jones and they felt that was enough representation. One time with one dancer isn’t enough. Why is dance hesitant to be body inclusive? Why is dance adamant on continuing archaic body standards—especially when it doesn’t match the collective society it exists in, you know?

**KAT:** YES. So many dancers I work with tell me they never even made it

to the point of an audition because of negative experiences and internalized anti-fatness. I even quit dancing several times.

How many amazing dancers is the world missing out on?

**ALEX:** Absolutely. I would love to see bigger bodied dancers in a professional setting. I look back at the younger me who felt so alone. I think about what seeing people who looked like me would have done for my experience and mental health. There is an active disconnect between mission statements and the representation we see in these settings. Companies can’t, in good faith, say they are advocating for diversity, equity and inclusion while not including different body types in that advocacy. It shows that there is a lot of work that still needs to be done. It’s not just

harming dancers with bigger bodies; it’s hurting everyone who participates in dance.

**KAT:** That is the magic of this work: It helps liberate everyone. Every person with a body deserves to live fully and joyfully without shame. And I know that for both of us, a full and joyous life includes dancing.

**KAT KOENEMANN** (she/her) is Dancers’ Groups’ General Manager, a dance instructor and consultant at Hipline, and a fat liberation activist. Kat has danced for 35+ years and performed with companies in Alabama, South Carolina, and the Bay Area. She lives in Oakland, CA. [@big\\_thick\\_energy](https://www.instagram.com/big_thick_energy/).

**ALEX TISCARENO** (she/they) is a plus-sized dance artist from Fresno, CA. Since starting her dance education in 2012, Alex has made it her mission to advocate for body inclusivity in professional dance spaces. Recently she obtained her MFA and is currently setting work with her company Aleño Dance Project.

PHOTOS BY ISABELLE DUFFY

by AFIA THOMPSON

# a QUEERspace for ALL



**BAHIYA** means beautiful in Arabic. We founded Bahiya Movement in 2011 to build a safe haven for those who are typically “other” by white-supremacist culture, which is very present in the performing arts community and beyond.

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Bahiya Movement is a Spring 2023 CA\$H grantee. This article highlights their funded activities and vision.

With Bahiya Movement all are welcomed, encouraged and supported to be unapologetically themselves! That is why, in 2023, we decided to pivot our Believe In Self (BIS) program to BIS-QUEERspace. We wanted to give those in the queer community a platform to be free, stand up and have a voice against bullying on all levels.

BIS-QUEERspace is a 2-month residency designed to provide young artists, ages 18-24, the skills they need to move forward with confidence and sustainability. Participants receive mentorship, rehearsal space and equipment (when available), support with works-in-progress, professional coaching, photo sessions, a final performance produced in collaboration with the other BIS participants and a stipend upon completion of the program.

We pride ourselves on offering a platform where All are Welcome, just be and do YOU, boo-boo!!

We understand that people come in many shapes and sizes, not only body types, but personality types as well. Look at Nafi and myself. As mother and daughter we bump heads and don’t always see eye to eye. We communicate through our hiccups and differences. We have attracted cool folks that don’t have drama, and we also are cool drama-free individuals.

I have felt out of sorts in groups that state they are focused on dismantling white supremacy and supporting Black people. I have been shushed, yelled at, bullied, and gaslit by several white-led organizations in the Bay Area. I have been told by the Black-owned organizations that I will mess it up for them, so just calm down. I have been blacklisted. And this is not just for being queer but for being unapologetically myself.

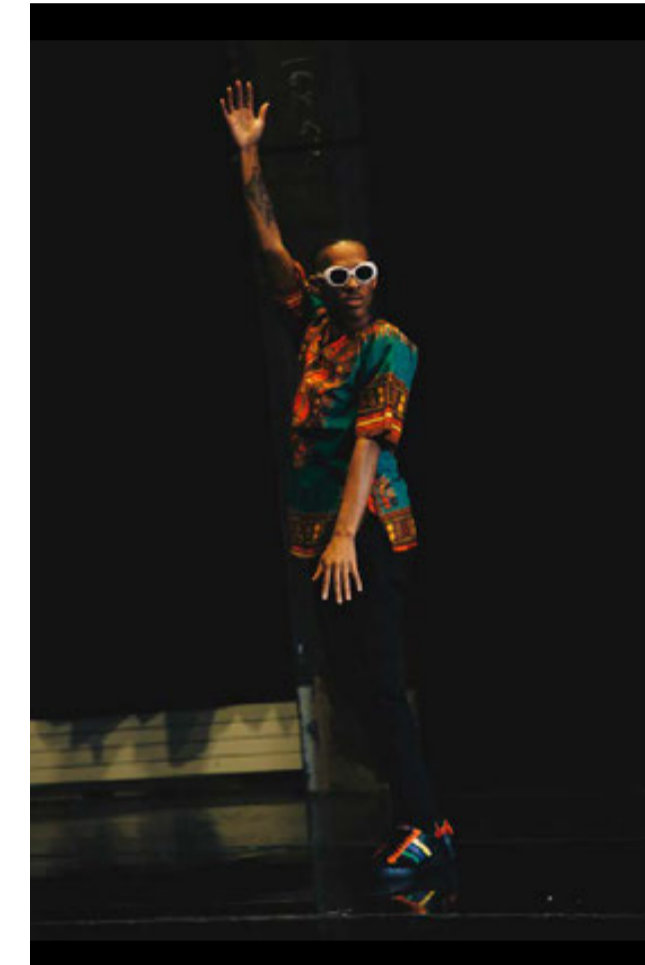
We understand that everyone is unique and will always support that uniqueness in YOU! In order to

manage and encourage the many styles of bodies Bahiya works with, we are big on everyone signing code of conduct agreements: respect yourself and respect others’ opinions and viewpoints. Judgement free zone. We talk through our differences. The same practices that Nafi and I follow for ourselves.

As a family owned and operated business there will be hiccups along the way. Nafi and I have found that com-

for dance. And the remembrance of how it feels to be shamed.

Nafi and I have always been told that, “You are a beautiful dancer, but you’re too big, you are too Black and outspoken, you are too opinionated.” We were tired of being looked at as angry Black women. We understood that if we are feeling this way, then others are too. So, let’s not fight in house, but turn



**I have felt out of sorts in groups that state they are focused on dismantling white supremacy and supporting Black people.**

munication is extremely important. Talking through how we are feeling about the programs, participants, choreography has kept us going strong for 12 years. Do we have disagreements? Sure, most def. Did some toes get stepped on? For sure, still do, just not as much. What is most important is keeping our focus on why do we do this. It’s because of the love we have

our attention on around and direct it towards those that continue to shame “others” like ourselves. From there we attract those that need to be in our family of Bahiya safe haven. By showing the world that we may be bludgeoned, but our head is not bowed!

**BAHIYA MOVEMENT** was founded by Nafi and Afia Thompson, a mother-daughter dynamic duo. Bahiya has zero tolerance for shaming, bullying, silencing and ostracizing BIPOC and LGBTQ++ folks. Dancers are loved for their different expressions of body, gender, race and culture. Through accessible training, residencies and showcases Bahiya provides resources to grow art and its impact on the world. To learn more about BIS-QUEERspace visit [bahiyamovement.com/believeinself-queerspace](http://bahiyamovement.com/believeinself-queerspace) @bahiyamovement\_dance

(LEFT) PHOTO BY CHANI BOCKWINKEL; (RIGHT) PHOTOS BY TANDRA KILLES



# MATERNAL *movement*

BY DANIELLE VIGIL

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Danielle Vigil is a Dancers' Group administrative assistant, personal trainer, choreographer, dance teacher and new mother. In writing about this topic Danielle reflects, "I want to acknowledge my privilege and perspective as a cisgender woman giving birth. I use the word mother, but really I mean any person giving birth and parenthood for anyone."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANIELLE VIGIL

I will never forget how my baby came into this world. It took two days of endless labor. Pacing back and forth in the delivery room, finding positions to ease the contractions, making sure I stayed hydrated, controlling my breathing. Finally, my angel arrived. I knew things would never be the same, but there are many things I did not foresee.

Life has a different rhythm to it. Everything revolves around the baby's schedule. When does he need to eat? Is he getting enough sleep? Another diaper change. Time to rock him to sleep. I'm reminded to move more slowly with things. Partly out of necessity, since I am constantly stopping to check on and tend to my





*Yet, I feel like we still stigmatize certain aspects of motherhood as something that is a burden or should be hidden.*

to my identity. I am missing that part of myself, even as I embrace motherhood. Where do I sit in between those two truths? I know that even though my body is changing, I will always find a way to dance. I just need to reevaluate what I need from my body and how I am using it.

I move differently. The way I curve my body to cradle him. The way I sway my body just right to rock him to sleep. I want to move a certain way but it feels so different, sometimes even painful. Everyone stresses the importance of taking care of yourself. Easier said than done. I find it hard to make time for self-care in the day-to-day. It's shown me how important it is to have a village that helps share the responsibility of childcare so you can get in that long-awaited shower, or sit down and eat food with two hands instead of one (seriously, it is a gift to eat with two hands).

We are all on this earth because someone gave birth to us. Yet, I feel like we still stigmatize certain aspects of motherhood as something that is a burden or should be hidden. A lot has changed, even in the past decade, but there is much more progress to be made with embracing mothers as whole people after they've given birth. Every space can be a space for mothers if we allow them the time to adapt and transform. I've noticed most public spaces don't have anywhere to nurse or pump comfortably. I also have rarely seen dancing parents bring their baby when taking class. I worry about all of the dirty looks I might

get if my baby dares to be a baby and cries. We must accept that babies and their caregivers are a crucial part of the continuance of life. What a miracle every life is.

Still, I struggle with guilt around my new normal and how it has affected work in particular. I feel like I am not always performing at my best, and I often question my value as an employee. Even though I work in an environment that is open and flexible with my new needs, those feelings seem ingrained in me, a mindset that I have to actively break through. Many employers pass over women for promotions. They are often seen as less committed than their male and/or childless colleagues, even though some studies suggest the opposite is true. Women are expected to be able to do it all: work, have kids, a social life, etc. Then penalized when we don't meet those impossible expectations. There are many days where I don't feel like I am enough, as a friend, as an employee, as a partner, daughter, or mother. Somehow seeing my baby wake up smiling every single day lets me know I'm doing something right. The whole experience is hard. The hardest thing I think I've ever done.

I'm loving every minute of it.

**DANIELLE VIGIL** is a dance-maker, educator, and personal trainer. She has danced throughout the Bay Area for over 30 years, including SF International Hip Hop DanceFest and Oakland Art & Soul Festival. When not cuddling with her new baby, she is giving private dance lessons, teaching theater arts, and working to develop a new dance collective.

baby, but also just as a life practice. Even writing this reflection has taken baby steps. Typing often with one hand. Pausing my thoughts constantly in order to tend to my little one. "Baby brain" making me completely lose my train of thought. I am exhausted, mentally and physically. Also, nobody tells you how hard breastfeeding and pumping is!

Speaking of which...time for a pump break...

Amidst these struggles, I still feel renewed.

A renewed sense of wonder as I help my baby see, hear, and experience things for the first time. I am soaking in every inch of his body and all the ways he is discovering himself and the world around him. I love our morning cuddles and our daily dance breaks. It is a joy getting to experience the world as he sees it.

A renewed way of communicating. Learning to communicate with my baby who can't verbally speak to me yet has been the new dance I'm trying to learn.

A renewed love for my husband. After the baby was born, it felt like I was meeting him for the first time, in the best way. I will cherish being able to witness how much love and attention he gives to our son, and the bond they are creating.

There is a certain duality to motherhood. I have someone in my life who relies on me completely, which can be both frustrating and rewarding. After all, who doesn't want to feel needed? But also, can I get five minutes to use the bathroom? I'm amazed at what

my body has accomplished. I grew another human being inside of me and pushed him out. I'm amazed that any of us are here on this earth!

I also feel a little betrayed by my body. I can't do all of the things I used to be able to do, even while I was pregnant. It's hard to believe I was teaching classes the day before my water broke. Now attending a class feels intimidating. I can barely get up from a grand plié. How am I supposed to keep up with an entire class? Dancing feels deeply connected

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANIELLE VIGIL



PHOTOS BY (LEFT) DANIEL SUN MEDIA, (RIGHT) ARTFUL EYE PHOTOS

# BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN FREESTYLE & CHOREOGRAPHY

BY TARIK ROLLERSON

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** 1Up Crew is a Spring 2023 CA\$H grantee.

**H**ere in the Bay Area, we have a very strong, talented and passionate dance community. Within the hip hop community there are two

different ways to express yourself through movement: freestyle and choreography.

Freestyle started at parties and social gatherings. Individuals connected with music and passion through cyphers: a circle where dancers freestyle and exchange energies. Choreography is an organized movement created to provide guidance for self-expression. Freestyle is usually found in street culture, whereas choreography is led inside studios. 1Up Crew strives to bring these two worlds together.

March 2013 is when Hollis Contreras and I started 1Up Crew. While starting this crew I was exposed to the freestyle scene. Coming from a choreography background I had a hard time adapting. I was told that I moved in a way that was too organized and predictable during my freestyling. While I had my own struggles transitioning into the freestyle scene,





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## 1Up Crew created an event format for choreography where we give dancers an opportunity to experience a battle-like tournament.

I was aware of the struggles others had as freestylers transitioning into choreography.

In choreography you are trying to match the choreographer's movement. For a freestyler accustomed to creating your own version of movement, it is difficult to learn to match the choreographer's posture, understand their weight-shifting, dance to counts. 1Up Crew had a lot of ups and downs adjusting so our dancers could participate in both choreography competitions and freestyle battles. Each of us had to work to understand both.

Freestyle and choreography complement each other when used together.

Freestyling supports choreography by expanding your creativity. When you freestyle, you find different ways to explore your own body. When choreographing, people often experience what we call "choreo block." Freestyling can help prevent getting stuck. Choreography can help freestylers with retaining material. Material is used in battles when you are stuck in a pinch and need a "wow" factor or crowd pleaser to respond to your opponent. Doing choreography can also help freestylers when it comes to teaching and passing down information.

1Up Crew brings these two worlds together by hosting our own labs, sessions (where dancers get together to practice and exchange energy), classes, battles and showcases. We participate in both choreography competitions and freestyle battles to show others that dance is beautiful in all forms.

1Up Crew created an event format for choreography where we give dancers an opportunity to experience a battle-like tournament. They each perform their 40- to 60-second routine and judges decide the winner on the spot. We call this event "We Does This: Choreography."

For freestylers, we created a 5 v. 5 team battle event called "Double or Nothing" (DON). At DON, teams are required to use commandos (a quick team routine) and utilize each member during each round. This battle is timed and inspired by the movie *You Got Served*.

We also started 1Up company classes for both dancers who do choreography and freestylers to participate in. In these classes you can learn a specific style such as popping, locking, turfing, afro and heels. We hope those who take choreography classes are willing to come and learn freestyle, and those who freestyle come and learn it in choreographic fashion.

1Up Crew is bridging the gap between freestyle and choreography. Through classes and events we can bring all dancers in our hip hop community together so we can further grow the culture while remembering the foundation of hip hop.

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**TARIK ROLLERSON** was born in Richmond, CA in 1993. He is the co-founder and director of [1Up Crew](#), established in 2013, based out of Oakland, CA. He has been the executive producer of *Prelude NorCal*, a dance competition series, since 2022. Tarik is a teacher and choreographer at In The Groove Studios and Sunset Academy of Dance. [@tupcrew](#) [@tslidah](#)

PHOTO BY KRISTIANNE BAUTISTA - K14

BY DIA DEAR

PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY



# LET'S SICK DANCE

Earlier this year scientists announced the earth's core's rotation slowed down, stopped and maybe even changed direction. **I think it's a hint.**



**NOTES BEFORE BEGINNING SICK DANCE:** the process is the purpose. Lean into comfort and ease and gentleness and curiosity over force and directing and doing. This movement practice is at best an invitation for your intelligent muscles and tissues to take over, directing your attention and movement. Take breaks as needed. All you need for this practice is a comfortable place to do it.

## TO BEGIN,

from an upright position (laying down if you are bed-bound to standing if you are able-bodied), come to stillness and slowly bring your \*attention\* to the points or areas of your body in contact with the ground. The ground is any stabilizing surface that is supporting you – bed to earth.

Notice the physical cues, physical sensations that tell you that you are touching the ground. Notice them in as much detail as possible as gently as possible. When you get distracted, begin again. Set a timer if you need or want, anywhere from 90 seconds to 5 minutes.

## BREAK.

Do whatever your body needs to do. Consider – what did you notice about your physical sensation of touching the ground?

When you're ready, **RETURN** again, to your upright position – laying down if you are bed-bound, seated/reclining/standing (whatever works for your disabilities), or standing if you are able-bodied. Closing your eyes if you like, breathing at your pace, center, settle. Now, in

stillness, direct your attention inward, to all the physical sensations of having a body you are aware of at this time.

You're not making anything up. The physical sensations could be obvious or subtle. They could be many or few. They could be small or large. Whatever you notice is good.

In your own time, allow your attention to come to rest on the Strongest Physical Sensation – this will be the easiest sensation to rest your attention in. Again, it could be anywhere in your body, any size, any intensity.

Gently, begin to notice the details of this Strongest Physical Sensation by first noticing the location of the sensation: where it is, and where it is not.

You may continue, then, to notice whether this sensation has any boundaries, and whether those boundaries connect to form a shape.

**CONTINUE**, if you are able, to notice in as much detail whether this sensation has any depth – your body exists in at least 3 dimensions, your physical sensations likely do too.



When you are ready, **WITNESS**, in addition to the location and depth, any textures within your Strongest Physical Sensations.

You may continue to notice some other details about your Strongest Physical Sensation. You may notice very few details. Whatever you notice is good. These details may be subtle or obvious, big or small, you may notice a lot or very little detail. You're not making anything up, you are just witnessing what is already here.

If it is easier for you to observe only one aspect of your Strongest Physical Sensation at a time, that's great. If you're able to practice witnessing different aspects together, that's great too. If the Strongest Physical Sensation moves or changes, allow your attention to move or change to follow

the Strongest Physical Sensation. If you notice you have lost the Strongest Physical Sensation, stop and begin again.

**SET A TIMER** and try this out for as long as you like, taking breaks as needed. When you choose to end the practice, rest. After resting, consider – what did you learn from witnessing your Strongest Physical Sensation?

**DIA DEAR** is a drag queen, choreographer and performance artist. Their artistry is inspired by their visible and "invisible" illnesses, disability, trans and genderqueer embodiment.

Their ongoing work, *Sick Dance*, is inspired by drag, chronic illness and pain, Long COVID, and the intersecting and interlocking ways systems of oppression impact our bodies. *Sick Dance* is funded by the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation, California Arts Council and individual supporters.

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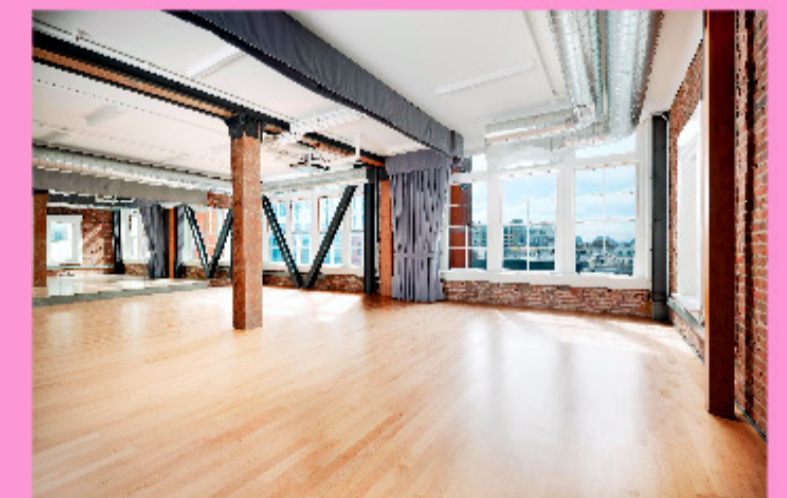
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# Views from the Porch

## *Reflections on Dance as a Practice of Being*

BY AUDREY JOHNSON

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Audrey Johnson is a Spring 2023 CA\$H grantee. This article highlights her funded activities and vision.

**A**s I sit on a porch overlooking a small meadow, the sky in a sensual humid holdout with the rain, crickets holding their breath as the trees tease coming winds, I am breathing within my now near daily practice of attunement. The meadow, the porch and I are on Cherokee land in the Blue Ridge mountains of northern Georgia, on the final days of an artist residency at the [Hambidge Center](#). Here to dig into my performance project *land/body/memory*, much of my time has been spent attuning, breathing, feeling and just being.

On this porch, I am a few hours' drive north of Macon, GA, the hometown my grandparents left for Detroit, MI, which is Anishinaabe land, along with so many of our folks during the Great Migration. Eventually they ended up in a house on Whitney Street, where in the '90s and early 2000s I would spend frequent days of

my childhood sitting on my grandmother's porch, eating Oreos, making mudpies in the dirt with my cousins, playing in the small urban meadows across from and to the left of their home (in other contexts also called vacant lots, abandoned, or blight).

Though the home is no longer in our family and my memories are colored in the skewed blurriness of a child's eyes, the home and street is a present place in my body-memory. The feeling shows up as a sense of slow wonder, and a reoccurring attraction to open grassy spaces, such as those speckling the neighborhoods of ungentrified Detroit.

These mini meadows, and the meadow I am looking out at now, are necessary spaces in which I have experienced my own Black queer feminist imagination, breathing, delicious boredom and zoning out dreaming time.

Here in Georgia on the porch, and in all the life that will happen beyond it, I locate myself as a part of this land, through my lineage as well as my present experience and participation with it. In my reattunement to the experience of "just being," I give a dear nod to bell hooks, who in

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUDREY JOHNSON

*Belonging* describes porches as liminal spaces, meeting places, places for Black fellowship and “a willingness to be known.”<sup>1</sup> hooks writes, “A perfect porch is a place where the soul can rest.”<sup>2</sup>

I’ve been practicing letting my soul and body rest, and allowing myself to know and be known by the land. This has been the crux of my creative work here really, once I let go of the expectations/assumptions that a residency should be more “productive” creatively than my life at home. Taking full breaths. Naps. Walks in the trees. Gazing at the sky. Time to listen to the plants and bugs, tracking the rhythms of the cicada and cricket chorus, their shifts in musical scores throughout different parts of the day and night.

All of these practices have been, for me, methods of attunement: to the land and to ourselves.

My project *landbodymemory* has become another one of these slowing down time, sitting and gazing out, attuning and listening practice spaces. The work has appeared in the world as a solo outdoor popup at Fort Mason in October 2022, and at ODC’s State of Play Festival in August 2023 as a duet with my dear friend Laila Shabazz. These performances and the coming iterations I am building now activate movement towards spacious breaths, body connected to the earth, attuned to the connectivity of being on this planet.

There is an ache I cannot ignore that arises within the capitalist, colonial project that rules many of our commonly accepted orders of space and time; an ache that no longer wants to deny our inherent connection to each other and the land, that instead asks for breath and healing connection to the land and each other. I am asking myself how the dance and performance making space I embark on can be a salve to that ache: a



re-remembering<sup>3</sup> of ourselves as part of land, and a reminder that we can do this re-remembering in the most simple of ways, ways that allow our souls to rest, such as sitting on a porch.

My residency time in Georgia has asked me to go still, be quiet and notice, dancing as a place where the noticing blends with the being, the stillness spreads open like unstructured time; memories, dreams and visions mesh. While I pursue making dances that allow for this kind of spacious freedom, I am growing in questions of how to keep working in this field in ways accessible to my own human body, a body that is changing—just like everything else. Out of physical necessity, I’m straying away from “impressive” moves or phrases that rely on a certain physical capacity, and moving into a rigorous commitment to presence, a space that asks me to really listen.

As I continue to understand *landbodymemory* as a project and a practice, I commit to my continued attunement process, dropping my shoulders when I can, breathing in rhythm with the earth when I can.

<sup>3</sup> The space between re and member is intentional. I recall a talk in which Alexis De Veaux described the word remember as a calling back of something in our bodies, a return of “member” as in a part of the body, a piece of ourselves. Allied Media Conference, 2020.

Perhaps the next time we meet dancing, we’ll start by just breathing. Hopefully we’ll get in some good time just simply “being.”

*Pretty much all of the ways I think about land and presence, and rest as radical practice, come from Black people and Indigenous people. I am thinking and making dance inside of a lineage of Black feminist thinkers, Black women, Black queer people. Additionally, as I learn about ways to connect with land and empower myself and community through my passion in plant work and herbalism, my teachers are and have been Indigenous folks, Black folks, and Brown folks. If you, like me, live on colonized land and have some access to resources like money or time, consider paying a land tax to [Shuumi land tax/Sogorea Te’](#) or to the [Ramaytush Ohlone land tax](#) and advocate for repatriation in moments possible. Land Back!*

**AUDREY JOHNSON** (she/her) is a queer, Black, mixed-race dance artist and plant worker with roots from Detroit, Michigan/Anishinaabe land, currently based in Oakland, CA/Ohlone land. Audrey’s work experiments with improvisation and embodied time travel in refusal of colonized time and space. [www.audreyjohnson.space](http://www.audreyjohnson.space)

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# C **IN** COMMUNITY



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## Driven Arts Collective

Driven Arts Collective is a Bay Area team of makers, dancers, visual artists, musicians, software engineers, and thinkers. They investigate planned and spontaneous ingenuity through technologically infused performance art, experimental modern contemporary dance, real-time generative music and video, custom programmed and designed wearable tech, film, video art, and whatever else they can get our hands on. [Drivenartscollective.com](http://Drivenartscollective.com)



PHOTO COURTESY OF ISHAMI DANCE COMPANY

## ISHAMI DANCE COMPANY

Ishami's mission is to explore, unite, and amplify the diverse voices, stories, and histories of the South Asian Diaspora, dismantle social and cultural constructs, through the performing arts. To create work using the idiom of South Asian Contemporary dance, treading the line between traditional and modern.

[ishamidancecompany.com](http://ishamidancecompany.com)

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## BRISBANE DANCE WORKSHOP

BDW is now registering new and returning students for the 2023-24 season. Classes begin on Mon, Oct 30, 2023. Registration is now open for children ages 3-14. BDW also provides opportunities for our teaching artists to show their own work in a performance setting. We are currently hiring and encouraging artists who enjoy teaching young students and wish to choreograph to contact us at [brisbanedanceworkshop@gmail.com](mailto:brisbanedanceworkshop@gmail.com). Please visit our website for more information.

[Brisbanedanceworkshop.org](http://Brisbanedanceworkshop.org)

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## BIENSTAR CONSULTING

Andreína Maldonado is the founder of BienStar Consulting, and co-founder of Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds, a free wellness and arts program for domestic workers and day laborers started in collaboration with [Dance Mission Theater](http://Dance Mission Theater) and the [La Colectiva de Mujeres](http://La Colectiva de Mujeres).

Andreína (she/her) is a Venezuelan anthropologist, performing artist, cultural worker, and registered Integral Yoga practitioner based in Yelamu, Ohlone Territory colonially known as San Francisco, California.

[Bienstar.biz](http://Bienstar.biz)

Instagram: [@bienstar.consulting](https://www.instagram.com/bienstar.consulting)



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANCE WITH E.N.A.

## Enakshi Vyas/Dance with E.N.A

Dance with E.N.A. was founded by Enakshi Vyas out of a need for more diverse dance programs in Marin County. They believe dance education teaches self-empowerment through movement, supporting both physical and mental health. #empowereddancers.

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[Dancewithena.com](http://Dancewithena.com)



COURTESY OF MPOWERDANCE

## JULIANA MENDONCA/ LIQUIDANZA

Mendonca is a dancer, choreographer and teacher with 20 years of experience as an immigrant dancer in California. She is focused on the development of her dance in the water, called Liquidanza.

Currently working in a private acclimatized pool in Oakland, Mendonca offers individual sessions, and sessions for couples. Also offered is a Liquidanza Contact Dance (once a month) and a Women's Circle in the water every Full Moon. Mendonca says that, "Dancing in the water is a very unique and special experience that allows us to get to know the liquid body and create a deep connection with the water for well-being and the development of bodily plasticity and creativity."

[Liquidanza.com](http://Liquidanza.com)

Instagram: [@juliana\\_mendonca\\_dance](https://www.instagram.com/juliana_mendonca_dance)

## MPOWERDANCE PROJECT

Since 1992 MpowerDance Project has been making dance that's committed to inclusion and social awareness. They offer opportunities in dance performance, dance and film, classes and interdisciplinary collaborations. In 2012 MpowerDance created the Global Dance Project. Weekly outdoor practices and indoor rehearsals in SF.

[Mpowerdance.net](http://Mpowerdance.net)

## DANCE THROUGH TIME

Dance Through Time (DTT) was founded in SF in 1980 by dancer, dance teacher and dance historian Carol Teten and toured for 40 years with historical reconstructions of European dance techniques from 1500 to the present. Today, DTT is under new direction and focuses on humanity as expressed through movement and time.

[Dancethroughtime.org](http://Dancethroughtime.org)



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