



WINTER 2024

indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.18 Lenora Lee Dance



P.26 The Echo Between Kink and Performance



P.32 Space to Speak

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WELCOME

by [ROWENA RICHIE](#), Guest Editor



“LIFE IS FRAGILE, HANDLE WITH CARE.”

So declared the tagline of a Dow Chemical safety campaign when I was growing up. Dad worked there as a safety engineer.

How do we engineer safety? What do we make spaces safe for? Who do we make spaces safe for?

Dow distributed shiny two-tone green stickers with nested figures: a little round figure inside a triangular figure inside a rectangular figure. We were told the sticker carried the message: Look out for your safety, and the safety and care of your community.

This issue of *In Dance* is dedicated to care. To unpacking what our art form and our community are

experiencing and exploring when it comes to practicing and performing care. How have our views of care and safety evolved in recent years?

“The pandemic and its ‘bubble’ confinement logic gave us the sensation that safety lies in solitude and inactivity. But safety is not the same as care, which requires interdependence and the risk of contact. Relationality is key.”¹

Think of this *In Dance* issue as a care package! Containing pieces on:

- Communication as care
- Aftercare
- Curation as care
- Dance company as care company
- Care for our past and future selves
- Care for the earth
- Care for immigrants
- Care for the archives

What is self-care, if relationality is key? There is a movement afoot to replace ‘caregiver’ with ‘care partner’ to shift the perspective, respect the care dynamic, represent reciprocity. But care too often becomes imbalanced. An estimated 43.5 million people in the United States provide unpaid care to an adult or a child.²

Those providing care develop “caregiver burden,” a state of complete overwhelm as a consequence of isolating, exploiting or undercompensating.

If you happened to visit Dolores Park during the early part of the pandemic you would have seen white circles spray-painted all over the lawn. A micro-community sprang up inside each ‘safety bubble.’ Risking contact! To lift our own and each other’s spirits. Look inside these pages to see ample evidence of care in dance — pictures, rituals, jams — elevating and amplifying what’s right in front of us. Care that includes people at the edges. Care for every single life.

Carefully yours,

Rowena

¹ Kristof Van Baarle, Felipe Cervera and Helena Grehan, “Stranger than Kindness,” *Performance Research: On Care* vol. 27, no. 6-7 (October/November 2022), 4.
² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8412180/>

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Photo by Warren Franklin

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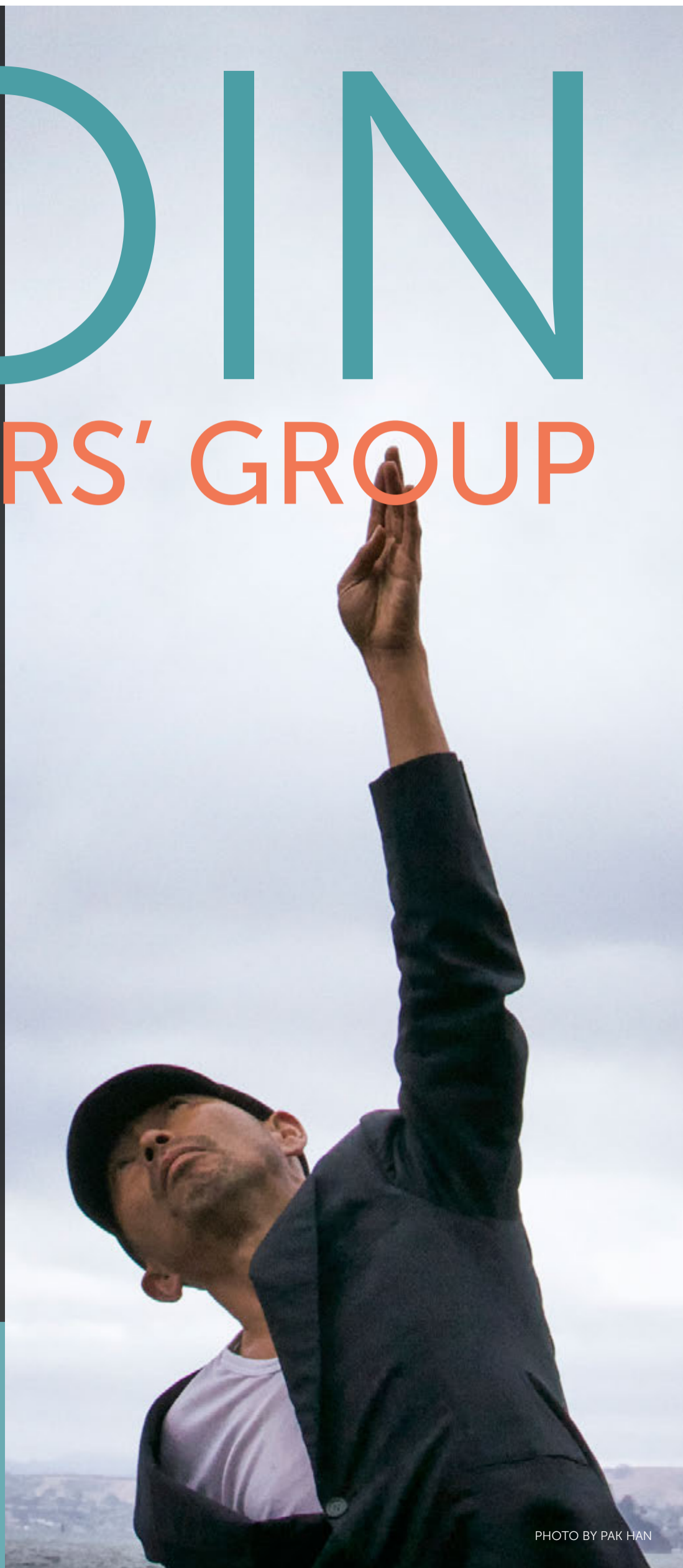


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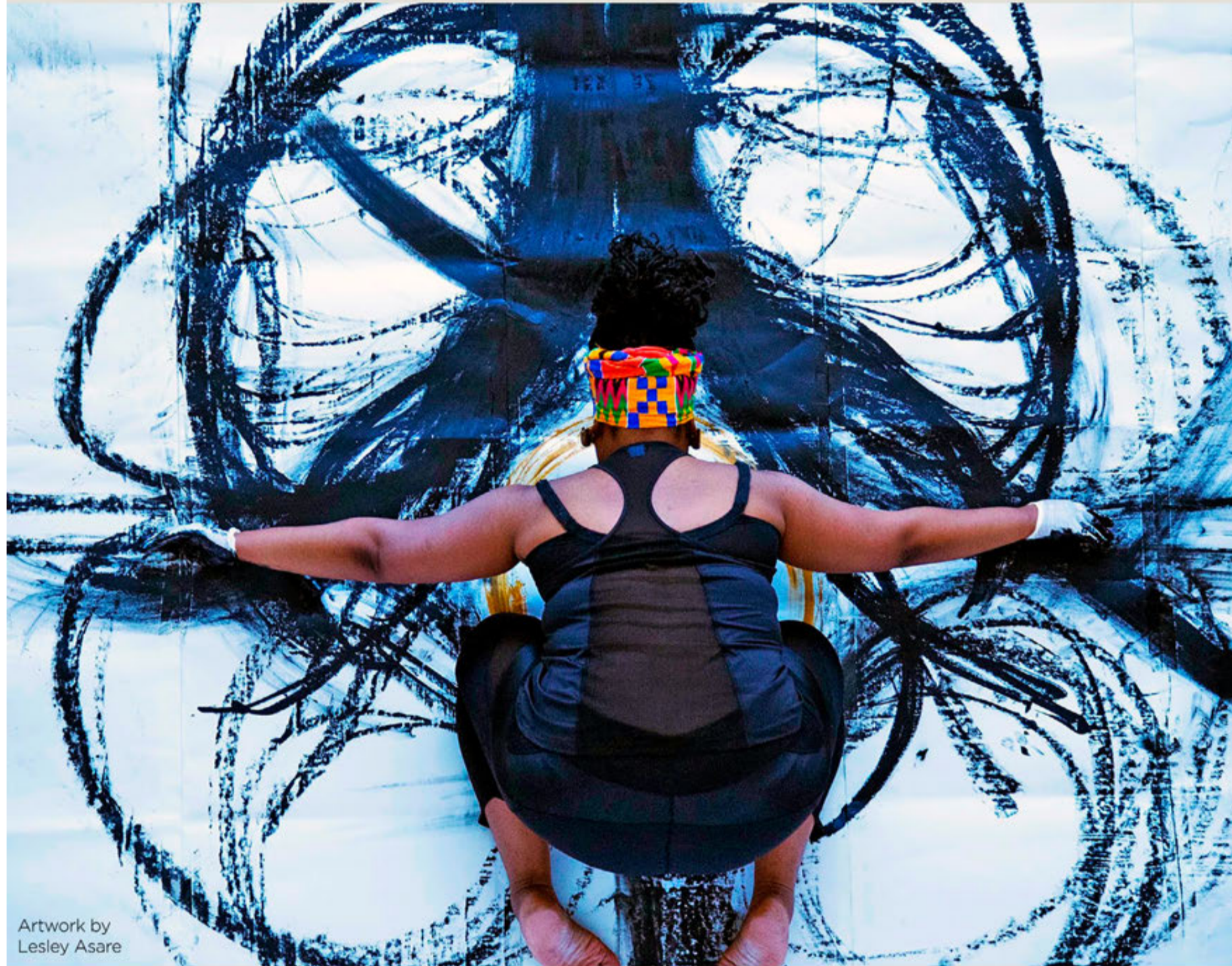


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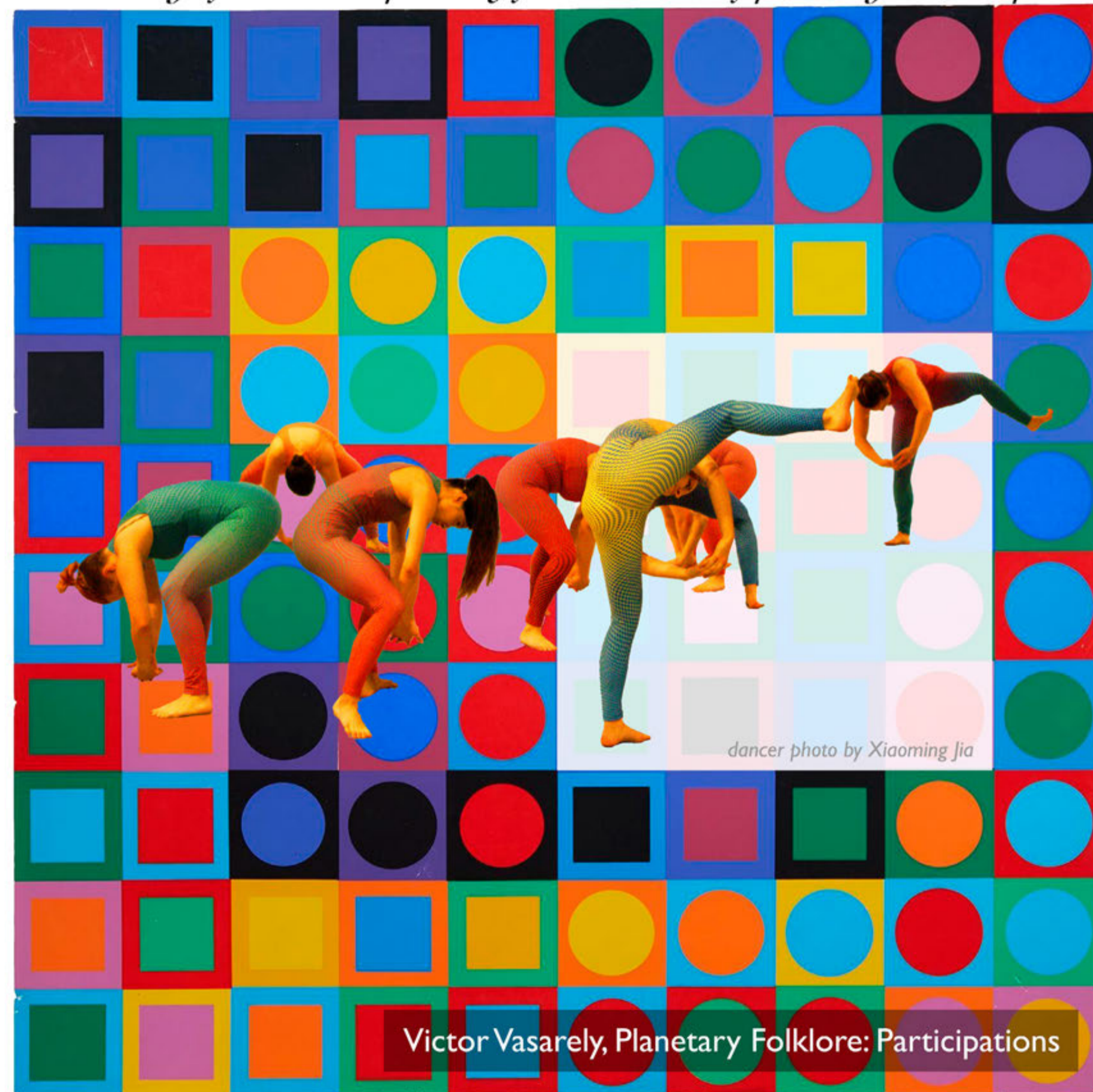
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(Left) CounterPulse Saraswathy Lakshmiraham, photo by Sean Anomic; (Clockwise from bottom) Arenas Dance Company, photo by Jim Watkins; Big Moves' emFATIC DANCE, photo by Lisa J. Ellis; Ballet22, photo by Natasha Adorlee; Joaques Whitfield, photo by Jim Watkins

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Curation as Care

CURATION COMES FROM THE LATIN ROOT WORD “CURARE”

which means “to take care of,” but Gayatri Gopinath, Director of the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality at NYU, suggests that we take this further to mean “to heal” so that curation does not simply become a rearrangement of dominant ideals, values, or aesthetics, but rather, “a mode of intersubjective, interrelational obligation.”¹ There is a long history of curation as an act of exercising power, rather than one that takes care of or heals artists. But in recent years, more and more predominantly white performing arts institutions are calling upon either external or internal curators to diversify their stages and depart from exclusionary histories. In the aftermath of the 2020 uprisings for racial justice, many artists of color have been invited to stages, panels,

¹ Gopinath, Gayatri. 2018. *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press.

and administrative positions we had never been invited onto before. In the Bay Area in particular, since 2021, we’ve had the opportunity to witness ODC Theater bring in guest curators, and now Maurya Kerr as the inaugural ODC Theater Resident Curator. This position is meant to expand the breadth of the performance offerings at ODC Theater and to engage with more collaborative modes of curation.

In February and March 2024, a program curated by Kerr along with guest curator Leyya Mona Tawil and ODC Theater Creative Director Chloë L. Zimberg will bring four remarkable performances to ODC’s stage. From February 23-25, ODC Theater will present Fanny Ara’s *Lilith*, and from March 8-10, the theater will present Kayla Farrish/Decent Structures Arts *Put Away the Fire, dear*, both of which were curated by Maurya Kerr and Leyya Mona Tawil. February 16-18 brings Rachael Lincoln and Leslie Seiters’ presentation of *Long Playing* to ODC Theater, which, along with Degenerate Art Ensemble’s *Skeleton Flower* from March 15-17, was curated by Zimberg. I had the chance to ask Kerr a few questions about her curatorial practice and can see the strong connections between the curated program and her “personal goal for our curational work together was to very consciously center racially marginalized voices.” Kerr sees part of her “responsibility as a black [sic] woman with access to power is to keep spending that privilege over and over and over again until as many of us are free(r) as possible.” This sort of values-centered curation can make space to change the paradigm of what is presented and who gets to be produced.

Values-centered curation is what brings six fantastic programs to ODC Theater in early 2024, and speaks to the importance of diverse bodies on stage. On the other hand, I admittedly wonder about the lenses through which we engage with diversity. Racial diversity is, of course, of paramount importance. As Kerr points out, “whiteness has been socially, politically, and artistically centered since white settlers slaughtered America’s indigenous peoples and enslaved and tortured Africans to build capital—it’s so fucking beyond time for that to end.” I wholeheartedly believe that decentering whiteness is necessary. And I wonder, in a larger picture beyond ODC’s upcoming season, if the curation of diversity has only gone skin deep in many attempts at diversifying stages across the performing arts. We are seeing Black and Brown bodies on stage (though not everywhere, and not all the time), but they aren’t always representative of the diversity of movement forms or playwrights, or composers. While I recognize that one person or one theater can’t do everything, I wonder when presenting institutions will demonstrate a priority

When curation is wielded as a tool for promoting counter-narratives, rather than a manifestation of power and privilege, we have the opportunity to convene with the possibility of other worlds and other ways of being.

to produce works that engage with forms of movement or music or theater that come from minoritarian artists. Movement form itself continues to be a lens of diversification that hasn’t yet been engaged quite as deeply as would be possible in larger institutions.

But I believe a different world is possible, and perhaps that possibility comes from the potential power of curation. So then, instead of an act of creating a new dominant narrative or recreating the old dominant narrative, what if we imagined the practice of curation in our institutions as liberatory, as acts of love, as ways to engage with social practice? How would this change the impact of our curatorial practices? I wonder if we can think about curation as a way to “open up other ways of seeing and sensing the world unimaginable through a normative lens.”² When curation is wielded as a tool for promoting counter-narratives, rather than a manifestation of power and privilege, we have the opportunity to convene with the possibility of other worlds and other ways of being. We get to engage with imagination. And we get to rearrange how we are in relationship to one another. The performing arts often transport us to new places and transform our world views, so we must lean into models of curation that highlight artists and art forms that are on the margins. I hold a healthy level of skepticism about the sustainability of such diversifying curatorial practices in performing arts institutions, but while it’s here, I’m going to enjoy and celebrate seeing artists like Fanny Ara, Degenerate Art Ensemble, Kayla Farrish, and Rachael Lincoln and Leslie Seiters this upcoming February and March.

BHUMI B PATEL directs pateldanceworks and is a queer, desi, home-seeker, science fiction choreographer, movement artist, and writer (she/they). In its purest form, she creates performance works as a love letter to her ancestors. Patel seeks to create movement at the intersection of embodied research and generating new futures, using improvisational practice for voice and body as a pursuit for liberation. Bhumi is a 2022-2023 Dance/USA Fellow and a 2023 YBCA 100 Honoree. She is a PhD candidate at Ohio State University, presents her research across the US on queer decoloniality and improvisation, and creates site specific work as a way of tracing the deeply woven connections in which we live—past, present, future—to build communities of nourishment and care.

² Ibid.

JAM OF OUR OWN

CULTIVATING BRAVE SPACE
FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR IN
CONTACT IMPROVISATION

BY OLIVIA TREVIÑO

BEGAN DANCING contact improvisation (CI) in 2014 and immediately fell in love with the form, taking a deep dive into study and practice. While I always felt welcome in the community at large, it was impossible for me to miss that, in every contact space or festival I set foot in, the *vast* majority of attendees were white, and I was one of the only people of color in the room. After eight years of practice and not much demographic change, the need for an affinity space for people of color within the wider CI community was clear. The Bay Area POC (people of color) Contact Improvisation Jam was created with the intention of increasing the accessibility and appeal of contact improvisation to POC by bringing us from the margins of the jam to the center, and by reducing the social-emotional barriers inherent to entering historically white communities and practices.

The POC Jam is a unique space with its own cultural feel. One year old as of January 2024, the POC Jam started as a [Sense Object Artists & Activists in Residence](#) project, and will continue to be produced by Sense Object as a stand alone program this year. I am one of the founders and hosts, the other is my close friend Inertia Dewitt. Our regular community members repeatedly share how important and nourishing this specific space is for them. And we have a very high rate of return for first timers, which is not the case for most contact spaces I have been a part of, especially among newcomers of color. As I have observed the jam this year, and had many conversations with attendees about their experience, I have arrived at an articulation of why this space feels so special and necessary.

CI is a practice that invites us to be as deeply in our somatic experience as possible. As POC in predominantly white space we are often dedicating varying levels of our energy and awareness to navigating and existing in white space. This impacts our nervous systems, reducing the energy we have to be in our somatic experience and enter into a state of ease, listening and connection. Several dancers who dance in all the various jams have commented that they didn't realize how true this was until they experienced their increased level of presence in the POC Jam. One jam attendee, Lindsey Ronice, said something to the effect of, "It is much easier to dance when you aren't fighting the impulse to be vigilant." It is a beautiful, warm and steadily growing community with a healthy future, and my hope is that it will support the evolution of the Bay Area CI community into a more diverse, inclusive and equitable space.

OLIVIA TREVIÑO (she/her) is a second and seventh generation Mexican-American of Indigenous (Chichimeca) and Spanish descent. She is a theatre artist, dancer, activist, educator, drama therapist and pre-licensed psychotherapist who places social justice, decolonization and liberation at the center of her personal and professional practices. Olivia holds a BA in Theatre with a dual emphasis in acting and directing from Cal State Long Beach and a Masters in Counseling Psychology in Drama Therapy from California Institute of Integral Studies.

For more reading on race and other demographics in the context of contact improvisation check out Keith Hennessy's 2019 *In Dance* essay [Questioning Contact Improvisation](#).



CASTING A LENS ON COMMUNITIES FOR 15 YEARS:

LENORA LEE DANCE

by HEATHER DESAULNIERS | PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENY





I've always been fascinated by the list of traditional and contemporary anniversary gifts. While some may find it random or even silly, I think it's quite telling. Each gift suggestion reveals so much about its corresponding milestone.

Take 15 for example - the year of crystal. An item of clarity, strength and specialness; of grace, transparency and attention to detail. A perfect symbol for the long-term, significant commitment that is 15 years. Everyone at Lenora Lee Dance (LLD) understands such power and preciousness. Founded in 2008 by dancer/choreographer/performer Lenora Lee, the company has always had several crystalline goals. Goals they continue to work at as they approach their 15th birthday this winter. To shine a light on personal stories. To share a broader perspective of marginalized

populations. To cast a lens on urgent community narratives, be they historic or present day.

Attention to community was woven into Lee's dance DNA early on, with three UCLA professors playing a pivotal, influential role. "Victoria Marks, David Gere and Peter Sellars instilled in me, as a college student, how crucial it was to create work about communities," Lee recounts, "to really research, understand and delve into unique and particular stories." After completing her studies and working as an independent artist in San Francisco for six years, Lee took that call bi-coastal, exploring her performance and choreographic career in both New York and SF. While she was drawn to the artistic drive and push in NYC, Lee eventually settled on the Bay Area, and it was in this

place that LLD was birthed. A signature style evolved over time. One of mixed discipline, collaborative, immersive and site-specific work, where movement seamlessly unites with music, text, sculpture, video and visual art. The eagerness to tell stories never wavered, especially stories close to Lee's heart, "It's always been about the content for me; themes I felt were important to learn more about — immigration and migration; detention and incarceration; violence against women and human trafficking; shared suffering and healing." That spirit has informed every LLD project for the past 15 years. 2019's *In the Skin of Her Hands* brought the all-too-common diagnosis of breast cancer to the stage while 2017's *Within These Walls* told of the Chinese immigration experience at the US Immigration Station, Angel Island.

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWENNY

PHOTO BY HIEN HUYNH

Immigration and migration are still front and center for LLD. Their [upcoming program](#), which runs February 2nd-4th at Dance Mission Theater, features two world premieres, each one tackling a current regional reality of US immigration. An entirely immersive 15-minute work, *In Visibility* welcomes audiences into the immigration dialogue, utilizing several alternative spaces in the Dance Mission building. "*In Visibility* focuses on the community efforts to stop the prison to ICE detention pipeline in California, which itself touches on multiple issues – detention, incarceration, separation of families, but also the strength of community mobility," adds Lee. Following the first piece, viewers will head into the main theater space at Dance Mission to witness *Convergent Waves: El Paso*. Journeying to that specific town in Texas, the 45-minute

mixed discipline piece unpacks migration at that southern border, primarily from recent years, but also through the decades. An audio score of interview excerpts (from experts in the field as well as affected populations) coupled with video footage that Lee shot in El Paso will lay bare the realities facing Latin American migrants. Historic images will show years and years of Chinese migration to that region as well. And the choreography, by Lee in collaboration with each performer, will celebrate the richness and fullness of every distinct body, with solos and duets speaking to the intimate nature of migration stories.

While the February performances are certainly on everyone's hearts and minds at LLD, a noteworthy occasion (like a 15th anniversary) does demand some reflection. "When I think about these past 15 years, I have a deep sense of gratitude for so many," recalls Lee, "there are the different venues that have worked with us, the funding sources and individual donors that have been very consistent, along with all the organizations that have supported us, like the National Park Service, Asian Improv aRts, API Cultural Center, the Chinese Historical Society, and advocate groups in the immigrant rights and Asian American communities, just to name a few." Lee also recognizes the privilege it has been to collaborate with so many interdisciplinary artists, including some who

have become longtime LLD collaborators like saxophonist, composer, and mentor Francis Wong, and media and graphic designer Olivia Ting.

At the same time, milestones also tend to point folks toward the next chapter, to what may be, to unknown possibilities. And Lee is eager to see what the future holds. "I'm looking forward to contributing my processes and methodologies to the next generation, the next community of artists," Lee shares, "and for LLD, I'm excited to broaden our scope, continue to develop and grow the company, and expand nationally and internationally."

Whether looking back, navigating the present or dreaming of the future, LLD has been fortunate to have been guided by many constants over the last decade and a half. And the most important of these has been Lee's belief that artists have a responsibility and can utilize their platform to say something with their work. For Lee, this has been to cast a lens on communities through performance – their realities, their complexities and their triumphs.

HEATHER DESAULNIERS is a freelance dance writer based in Oakland. She is the Editorial Associate and SF/Bay Area columnist for *CriticalDance*, the dance curator for *SF Arts Monthly*, and contributes to several other dance-focused publications, including formerly to *DanceTabs*.

For more information, please visit: lenoraledance.com



FUNNY LITTLE MONSTERS AND BEING SAFE ENOUGH TO BE DANGEROUS

EDITOR'S NOTE: I've collaborated with choreographer and director Erika Chong Shuch on and off since 2001. Erika, Ryan Tacata and I have a social practice and performance group called For You. Through 'deep hanging out' we've gotten to know specific people, and then enrolled them as audience-participants in tailored performative responses. Whether performing in Erika's choreographic work, or collaborating

alongside her with For You, I feel challenged and inspired to channel my wildness. I call it "taking a strangeness pill."

I recently revisited an [In Dance SPEAK](#) piece that Erika wrote in 2008. I discovered that her version of a "strangeness pill" is "funny little monsters." I invited Erika to reflect on how her creative process and funny little monsters have changed since then. Here are a couple excerpts from her SPEAK essay:

When I was a kid, I had a dollhouse. I didn't want dolls because I knew that there were REAL little people (that happened to be invisible), and that dolls would scare them away. I put food out for the little people on mini dollhouse plates. Every morning, I noticed that the mounds of food were smaller. This was for certain. [These days,] I need to start leaving food out for my little people; to feed the dark night where my funny little monsters can live without the pressure of defending their existence.

Frida Kahlo said in an interview once: 'They thought I was a surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality.' What would it be like (and

I'm not saying Kahlo's life was like this) to have no filtration system between the things we imagine, and the work we create?

ROWENA: I recently reread your SPEAK piece from 15 years ago and it read as so current. Can you summarize what you were trying to say?

ERIKA: Yeah, I can summarize what I was trying to say because I still feel the same way! I was trying to say I get scared that I can talk a talk but not walk a walk. Because so much of our livelihood as freelance artists is connected to how we talk or write about our work, there is the potential that words twist the raw intent of our work into something else. I feel the potential for that disconnect.

ROWENA: Where does that fear originate?

ERIKA: We all develop our own rubrics for how to measure our successes and failures. My internal compass

brings me back to questions of authenticity: does this creative choice, or grant, or article feel aligned with who I am, what I care about, what I'm thinking about? I try to consider grant writing, outreach and marketing as an extension of the creative process — it's all part of building broader communities and conversations around the art. I have strong alarms that go off when I say something that feels off, and then I'm like, "Oh, fuck, that thing that I said actually doesn't quite feel true."

ROWENA: Is there pressure to say something that doesn't feel authentic to you?

ERIKA: I wonder if over the decades we're just being asked different questions? These days we're being asked, "How is the work relevant? How is it contributing towards the betterment of society?" I'm trying to remember if 15 years ago those questions were up as hard as they are now. I try not to get bitter about needing to "justify" why art is relevant. I try not to get sarcastic about being asked hard questions. I try to say, "How awesome is it that as the world changes, the needs change, and as the needs change, the art changes and so the questions change." I guess the question is: as the questions change, does the work change to accommodate them?

ROWENA: When I first met you you said performance making helped you process your own experiences with

love, death and grief. Which feels like it dovetails with what you wrote about Frida Kahlo 'painting her own reality.' Fifteen years later, you started For You — originally a series of projects, and now our collective — that creates work in response to other people's experiences. Why the flip?

ERIKA: I think that our work through For You still functions to process my own experiences with love and grief. But the things that I grieve have changed. My longings have changed. Even though this whole body of work that For You has been making is created in response to other people's lives, it still feels like it's driven by my own need—my need to connect, my need to fold into the life of a stranger, my need get weird with you and Ryan by making weird art. Because For You's work is so intimate and personal, it's been amazing to understand more immediately how our work moves and touches and inspires.

ROWENA: Have your "funny little monsters" changed over the years?

ERIKA: I was awake in the middle of the night thinking that now my funny little monsters are in the form of a back-ache. A stiff elbow. Various ailments. I guess my funny little monsters have gotten more aggressive because I really like to sleep. But when I get a flash in the middle of the night, I grab my little pen beside my bed because things just come in. Strong hits of an image, or an idea, a song, a structure.

I try not to get frustrated that they're coming at me in the middle of the night. I try to say, "How cool is it that there's something that I care so much about that it's gonna keep me up. How cool that my subconscious is starting to fire and work out all of those problems that can't be worked out through the logical mind during the day!" I try to meet the funny little monsters with open arms.

ROWENA: What are your favorite kinds of spaces to create in?

ERIKA: I find myself grateful that there are a lot of opportunities in rehearsal rooms these days for a more transparent, less hierarchical process. There are so many structures in place to create a sense of safety and harmony. It makes me reflect on how I am holding space for performers now versus how I held space for performers 20 years ago.

ROWENA: Are there elements you want to preserve from those earlier times?

ERIKA: I'm thinking about me and my friend, Evie. When we went to college together everybody around us was doing contact improv. But we decided that we wanted to do this thing called *impact improv*. Stand on opposite ends of the dance studio at UC Santa Cruz, and just run towards each other as fast as we could and crash into each other. Just see what happened. And, we got hurt. But that felt safe for us. We felt that we had the kind of relationship that could support that. And I think those are my favorite kinds of processes, where you're like, "I feel safe enough to be unsafe." And what do I mean by unsafe? I mean to just risk doing the wrong thing or being an asshole. And I think that's why I love working in this collective with you and Ryan. We can say the wrong thing and move on. When people talk about safe spaces these days, I wonder, for what purpose? I would like to think that we create a safe space so we can be a little bit dangerous together.

ROWENA: Has something been lost in creative spaces and processes?

ERIKA: It would be easy for me to make a claim that it used to be better when we didn't have to talk so much about our feelings, or do so much checking in! I don't always love being super process-y in that way. Sometimes I miss being in top-down, pugnacious processes! I appreciate the energy



and heat in these heightened creative pressure cookers. I worked for a choreographer in Berlin who was so opinionated, so rigorous, so mean, so chain-smoking. It was fucking hard submitting to somebody else's impulse that I didn't always understand. But I believed in their vision. I'm happy to be dommed by somebody who I trust in that way. And so I think it's really easy to say, "Things were better when...." But I don't think it's that simple.

ROWENA: Can you say more about the complexity?

ERIKA: I think when we were younger, there was a sense that the older people were the masters. That's really being challenged. When I work with younger people right now I try to put myself in the mindset of 'younger person as master.' I try to understand the specific wisdom and insight and rawness...When I reread that SPEAK article, I was like, "Oh, my writing was just so raw." As a younger artist there was a rawness to my work and it was more impulsive. I'm just now getting to the point where I can appreciate that younger self of mine, as opposed to judging her. I can appreciate that rawness. I hope that within these rehearsal spaces and creative spaces, where there is so much communication and care, that there is also room for the impulsive and the raw. Yeah, room to be careful and communicative, but also messy and raw and dangerous.

ERIKA CHONG SHUCH is a choreographer, director and performance maker whose work spans devised experimental performance and social practice, and produces unexpected forms of audience engagement. She is a choreographer for regional theaters across the country, and co-founded the performance and social practice group, For You.



PHOTO BY DREW ALTZER PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

THE ECHO BETWEEN **KINK + PERFORMANCE**

PHOTOS AND STORY BY KEGAN MARLING



EDITOR'S NOTE: I am curious about the other creative passions dancers are into, the influence of dance on those pursuits and vice versa. I originally met Kegan Marling years ago when they were on staff at Dancers' Group. Later I had the joy of performing with them. More recently I became aware of Kegan's photography practice when they were shooting a show I was in. When I learned that Kegan worked as a photographer for Mr. S Leather I got really interested in the intersection of dance and kink in photography.

IT'S A JOY PHOTOGRAPHING DANCERS, yet I'm also drawn to how movement exists outside of the dance studio and off the stage, within the bodies of those who might not necessarily consider themselves dancers. When asked about the confluence of dance and photography in my work, I immediately thought of the fluidity and performance within the kink community – the dramatic movement of a whip through space, the choreographed architecture of the body tied up, and the entwining of bodies during aftercare.

There is an interesting echo between performance and kink. Terms like scene, roles and props are commonly used, as are many of the guiding principles of improvisation. I've heard people talk about their "pre-show rituals," and roleplay and cosplay are essentially theater. The accompanying two scenes reflect some of these dancerly qualities in kink. The first set (featuring Danny Nguyen) suggests a performative energy and flow, with numerous props including ropes, floggers and roses and the Folsom Street Fair crowd watching from all around. The second set (Johnny Tohme/Welder ONYX and Rey ONYX) leans into the composition of space and entwining of bodies, and closes with Rey in their pup hood receiving aftercare.

Kink scenes often end with some version of aftercare – a sort of closure ritual. Like dance, kink can be very physically and emotionally demanding. Aftercare is an intimate check-in with each other: How is your body? Where is your mind? What support would help? What does your body need right now to come down from that emotional and physical high?

Perhaps this is one area where I could have taken a lesson from kink – when I think back to the crash that often came at the end of a dance performance, a little aftercare wouldn't have hurt.





Photography by Kegan Marling, in collaboration with ONYX Northwest members: Graylin Thornton, Danny Nguyen, Johnny Tohme (Welder ONYX) and Rey ONYX. ONYX is a nationwide organization formed and operated by queer Men of Color who enjoy the leather and kink lifestyle. The organization provides information, resources and community activities to help educate and empower BIPOC men. (onyxnorthwest.com). Additional thanks to The Academy SF for providing the location.





TO P A C S P E A K

by ZACKARY FORCUM | photos by ROBBIE SWEENEY

IT WAS AGENT BETTY THAT I SAW FIRST. I was traveling home on BART, listening to some 1980's rock music when they stepped into my mind and stood in front of a well-armed police station. Cops surrounded the lone fighter but within seconds of engaging one another, Betty bested all of them in hand-to-hand combat.

"Why is Betty here?" I thought.

Silence for a moment and then, "They are orchestrating a jailbreak" a voice answered.

"Ok... so why orchestrate a jailbreak at all?"

More momentary silence. "Perhaps..."

The people being held inside are innocent of the crime they are being accused of. Perhaps if they aren't rescued, terrible things will happen to them."

"So... what is the crime?"

"It would have to be BIG."

Another voice, one with a flair for the dramatic, answered, "The Great Commander is DEAD!"

IT ACTUALLY WASN'T THAT MOMENT

that I knew I had something. Just spare thoughts singing to me, helping me wander through the monotony that accompanies public transit.

But as often the case in circumstances like this... This scene replayed in my mind over and over, often as I walked the dog or picked up morning coffee or rushed away to work. So... I keep asking questions. Questions seemed to help calm my mind, to help me think on other things.

"Who is the Commander and why is he dead? NO.. why was he murdered?"

"Who was the murderer?"

"Who are the suspects?" "Why are they the suspects?"

And so, the story began to develop of a world, which on the surface was filled with good gods and evil devils, but when considered closer, we find out that everyone is a villain.

I FELT LIKE I WAS DONE with the Bay Area's dance scene. I had learned from an early age that when love is no longer being served, it's time to go. As we

reemerged from the pandemic, with so many friends and leaders who had left the region (and so many of the ones who remained struggling to simply function in this wild world), and experiencing so much finger pointing and infighting within the community, you could say I was disillusioned. That the veneer that surrounded our field, one I once wanted to embrace and be a part of, had not only lost its shine and allure but also, any practical use.

Before the pandemic fatally struck and collapsed so much of our industry, I also knew it was time for a change. I had been creating and performing new dance theater works as a solo artist under my company OOMPH Dance Theater, and while I was getting constructive attention, I knew it was time to think bigger. I didn't necessarily know what that meant at the time, and all the while the pandemic held us all hostage (along with losing all career-momentum that I built up), I still didn't discover what that meant.

I also had spent so much time from 2017-2019 creating work around the

intricacies of trauma and examining it onstage, but a shift had occurred within me. I had realized that I held onto anger as a means of survival and an attempt at controlling the last bits that remained in the wake of all that had been taken from me from big-ots and abusers. That the tactics that had saved me for so much of my life had started to become a detriment. I began to wonder... if I keep holding onto all of this anger to maintain

the remaining fragments of what was lost... is there room for anything else? What else could there be space for—where else might I go? What would happen if I consented to something I had always put out of reach? What would happen if I allowed myself to surrender my anger? What would happen if I allowed myself and others the mercy of forgiveness? Thus, I began to wonder how true "healing" could be observed in my work.

As it got safer to be in the world once more, and not necessarily knowing how to step forward, I told myself it was time to try new things. So I joined a rugby team and god I was terrible (I got better, but boy-howdy, I was magnificently bad in the beginning). I also consented to work with a close friend on a movement-poetry performance piece focusing on "softness" (an always worthy pursuit). And of course, Agent Betty and the

constantly evolving story that silently traveled with me wherever I went was only satisfied if I actively kept dreaming it—developing it—giving form to what was speaking to me.

It seemed to me that the best way to tell the story was by writing a dance theater play. Not necessarily a musical, but a narrative and text-based production that utilized dance (outlined as choreographic scores within the work). I came to call the piece, "Villains." I sat

What would happen if I allowed myself to surrender my anger? What would happen if I allowed myself and others the mercy of forgiveness? Thus, I began to wonder how true "healing" could be observed in my work.



They say what you yearn for, yearns for you too: as I generated the work, what surprised me most is how much this story about comic-book-like villains really became a story about how we can choose to repeat the sins of the past or how we can embrace forgiveness and release vengeful anger and work to heal.

down and outlined the production to provide a structure to work from—it would be a play in two acts. The first act would function as a “who done it” murder mystery, introducing all major characters and setting the stage for act two, which would showcase all parties banding together to defeat a “big bad” enemy. All movement would be based in a sense of magical realism, and would be utilized to not only further the plot and tell the story, but also to showcase the extraordinary abilities of the super-villains themselves. Dance to me has always been somewhat magical and mysterious, so why not have these characters’ otherworldly powers be experienced through the medium? A voice told me to think big and unencumbered and as I began writing I knew I needed to build a world in which to properly tell the story—that the setting itself was its own character, and that in addition to the piece’s leading figures I would need a Greek-like chorus, an ensemble that would shape-shift repeatedly to tell the stories of the people living within a troubled city.

WHEN I CREATE, I often think of playwright Suzan-Lori Parks who once shared, “Why do I write? Sometimes I feel like I’m a haunted house. And writing helps me deal with the spirits that reside in the house.” Our culture places so much importance on the sole “leaders,” the CEO geniuses of the world who have such great ideas that often do not come from them at all. I don’t really function like that, but like Parks, and many great companies in the Bay Area that value collective leadership, I feel like a vessel.

The only time I feel like I am at a loss or am fighting my creative process is when I do not write/dance.

Because when I sit down and hold space for the voices that want to speak, they flow out of me. And it is these moments where I feel most powerful and alive. So logical are their responses, shaping their form with characters, situations, lives that have been lived in and have a depth of meaning/experience.

Of course it is not only inspiration that shapes my work, but also my years working in the craft. I often think of Jim Berman from UC Santa Cruz who encouraged his playwriting students that everytime a character spoke there was a reason for it and that realism on stage was never 100% real, that it was either 90% or 110%—we are manufacturing the moment being witnessed onstage, and that because of this, we can make these moments progress better than they are experienced in everyday reality. The influence of my great dance mentor Jacqueline Burgess is always with me—who encouraged me to utilize movement in the process of abstraction, to tell deeper narratives through dance when words are inadequate/take too long/fail all together.

The results that have come through in this process have been... surprising. They say what you yearn for, yearns for you too: as I generated the work, what surprised me most is how much this story about comic-book-like villains really became a story about how we can choose to repeat the sins of the past or how we can embrace forgiveness and release vengeful anger and work to heal.

IN THIS PROCESS, I’ve often cried when I write. The voices and scenes that flash through my mind do not demand much, but space to be heard and I find the stories they tell a bit

heartbreaking at moments. As I began to finish the work at the end of summer 2023 my father became deadly ill. As I helped him recover throughout the fall, I needed to save my tears for a different kind of work with him (much to the voices’ discontent). At the time of writing this article I have three scenes left to complete...

I look forward to welcoming the Bay Area’s dance community into a staged reading of “Villains” in spring 2024. I find... people love villains. Not only since they are often fabulous and unapologetically outwardly-delight in their lives and purpose (which is a joy to witness), but because at the end of the day, we are all painted as the villain at some point (or many points) in our lives. That it is in the villain, not the hero, that we truly see ourselves. That the internal conflict which so many struggle with is central to our humanity. As so many know but easily forget when push-comes-to-shove, the complexity of the world cannot be affixed to the binary of black and white, good or evil, right and wrong—that sometimes... the wrong is right, the bad guy is good, and that when we label someone as the villain, we become one too. I look forward to sharing this work with you. Until then, please be kind with yourselves and with others. And give the voices space to speak.

ZACKARY FORCUM (they/he) leads OOMPH Dance Theater where they create work at the cross-roads of movement/narrative. Their work has been presented in WESTWAVE, SPF, NQAF Festivals, are a past Lead Artist for SAFE-house and Artist Adaptability Circles, and their performance *femmes refusal* was nominated for a 2020 Isadora Duncan Award. Forcum holds their MFA in Choreography & Performance from Mills College & BA in Theatre Arts from UC Santa Cruz.



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WHAT HAPPENS

by WENDY ROGERS AND PIPER THOMASSON



L-R Wendy Rogers, Betsy Claassen, Donna Yamagata & Janice Blalock; chenille tent conception & design by Wendy Rogers, pattern design by Robert Kushner & Rogers, engineering & construction by Florence Rogers for Rogers' *Tropical Chenille*, Wendy Rogers Dance Company, Berkeley, CA (1978); photo: Warren Franklin



Wendy Rogers & John Diaz, Rogers in collaboration with the dancers and many others for *REPO the body of work*, with curator Tyler Stallings, Culver Center of the Arts, Riverside, CA, (2013); photo: Jonathan Godoy



L-R Wendy Rogers, Liz McDonough (slide) & Piper Thomasson; hat by Robert Kushner for Rogers' *popular demand*, Wendy Rogers Dance Company, NYC (1985), slide photo: Tom Haynes; Pinole, CA (2023), photo: David Tobis, Wendy Rogers & Piper Thomasson

Wendy Rogers' backstory: Since 2011, *See What Happens* (SWH) recovers and explores the material and lived archive of my *Body of Work* (1968-present). Together with multi-generational collaborators, I repossess moving artifacts, while generating dances arising from the emerging present. We reinterpret, re-mix and repurpose. We engage directly with the temporality of dance and a dancer's body, raising questions of who dances how over time. I also tap the material *Body of Work* — video and audio recordings, costumes, sets, photos, etc. — to construct public offerings of live performance, exhibition, digital media and/or talk-story. Every studio and storage foray fills me with gratitude for work made and life lived with extraordinary artists. Names exceed word count.

I am grounded in the radical pedagogy of Ruth Hatfield begun in childhood, Berkeley, 1957. Movement exploration is primary. Years of study and/or performance with modern/postmodern artists (e.g. David Wood, Margaret Jenkins, Merce Cunningham, Sara Rudner) led me to a neo-experimental approach, set and improvised work. I dance in dialogue with the work of others across decades, following composer Lou Harrison's words:

“Cherish, conserve, consider, create.” In multi-year projects, dancing evolves into specific performances allied to occasion and place and persons. I commit to shared authorship with dancers and collaborating artists.

In fall 2019, after two decades as an expat in the Inland Empire, I pulled up stakes, and headed home to the East Bay where I grew up dancing and later established the Wendy Rogers Dance Company (WRDC 1978-1990). The pandemic interrupted my third ten-year project, SWH (2011-2020). The ‘2020 vision’ I had imagined became a blur. Political turmoil, climate disasters, social upheaval imbued with appalling racial injustice, as well as extreme and residual circumstances of pandemic, call everything into question.

Piper here. Hi! We'll get to why I'm here in a second, but I want to introduce myself. I'm a Black and Japanese, Queer, female storyteller and artist. My mediums are dance and language arts. I love living in the East Bay and am grateful to the Ohlone peoples for their stewardship of this land and acknowledge that we are living on their unceded ancestral home. Dance is the only thing I have always

known I have wanted to do forever. Starting at age 3, I have never stopped. It has saved my life in many ways, many times. Studying grant writing became a way to support and secure my space in the arts. My work with Wendy, among the many benefits, validates that I made the right decision in following my passions. Especially in the service of something bigger than myself.

Wendy continues: And then, in the midst of 2020 quarantine, wendyrogersdancing.com, a digital venue for SWH, crashed. Recommendations led me to Piper Thomasson. The archive in its entirety became our project. Piper helps me write proposals. (Also, there was the night she joined me to rescue the archive from a flooding storage space.) We share mutual excitements considering our perspectives on present times: mine as a White, seasoned dance artist with roots in seventies activism; hers as a smart, Black dance artist with stories to tell. We share an agenda to bring more recognition to East Bay dance cultures. Her support and challenges shape SWH in ways that reassure me of its value. We both have a stake in what we want to learn from the past and to achieve going forward. Our collaboration mirrors the project itself.

Hi again. I agree with Wendy; let me name that in no uncertain terms. Even at the beginning, my input in proposal writing about why this project is relevant and worthwhile has influenced SWH. In real time, we are contributing to the archive and everything that the archive will be.

I grew up in Stockton, CA. Plenty can be said about that city. For example: “I love it.” Or, “As far as I'm aware, it was no hub for arts or dance culture when I was growing up in the nineties.” It's certainly gotten better — shout out to Elazar Abraham and HATCH Workshop — but I wasn't patient. I moved to the Bay Area wanting to be amongst artists and art, armed with my passion, curiosity, and work ethic.

Even after a(n unexpectedly) rich experience earning a degree in Dance in the Silicon Valley, it wasn't until I moved to the East Bay and encountered Wendy and her archive that I learned how radically possible and democratic the process of art making could be. Wendy already had a great prototype with her 10-year project approach. I knew this needed to be shared. The *Body of Work* is so rich, and what Wendy is doing with it and how she's sharing it have the potential to set a powerful precedent for collaboration and reflection.

Part of what intrigued me was Wendy's rejection of the conventional funding schedule. Grant and fellowship cycles became a part of her extended creative process, not the process being beholden to the cycle. AND YES. I recognize the privilege necessary to be able to do that...but I never thought I'd see a White artist choose to reject a system built for them. Not only was Wendy working outside of that system, she did it successfully. For me this shows “it's possible” instead of “is it even possible?” to change the way art is made, funded, appreciated and recognized.

Wendy closes: Instead of ending, SWH has become an ongoing way to be, whether instigating activities or welcoming opportunities generated by others. I reinvent how to move in studio time with Sara Rudner and Risa Jaroslow, dance mates from NYC circa 1975, together again in the East Bay! I have relished interacting with the mix of dance artists gathered by Margaret Jenkins' *Encounters Over 60*. I was her student circa 1971. I continue making work with Jennifer Jerum and John Diaz, dance mates from SoCal since 1997. A recording of one of my stories circulates nationally (and without me) accompanying dancers in *The Running Show* (2018-present),

created by Monica Bill Barnes and Robbie Saenz de Viteri. Monica was my student in San Diego circa 1993. Piper and I research potential homes for set paintings and other collaborations (1976-1988) with NYC artist Robert Kushner. I am remastering groundbreaking, electronic music from the seventies. Bay Area composer Paul DeMarinis recently sent me a tape I had forgotten, 3 *Easel Studies for Wendy Rogers*, realized in 1975 on the Buchla Music Easel. How inviting for a next SWH venture.

WENDY ROGERS has choreographed and performed contemporary dances for 55 years, in the SF Bay Area, NYC and SoCal, where she taught contemporary dance at UC Riverside 1996-2016. Honors include Fellowships from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Irvine Fellowship in Dance and a 2009 Fulbright in Malaysia.

PIPER THOMASSON has English and Dance BAs from Santa Clara University where she received the Anna Halprin Award for Excellence in Dance and the Gracelyn Rillorta Bateman Award for Inclusive Excellence. More recently, she's a CCI Cali Catalyst Award winner and dancer with Antoine Hunter's Urban Jazz Dance Company.

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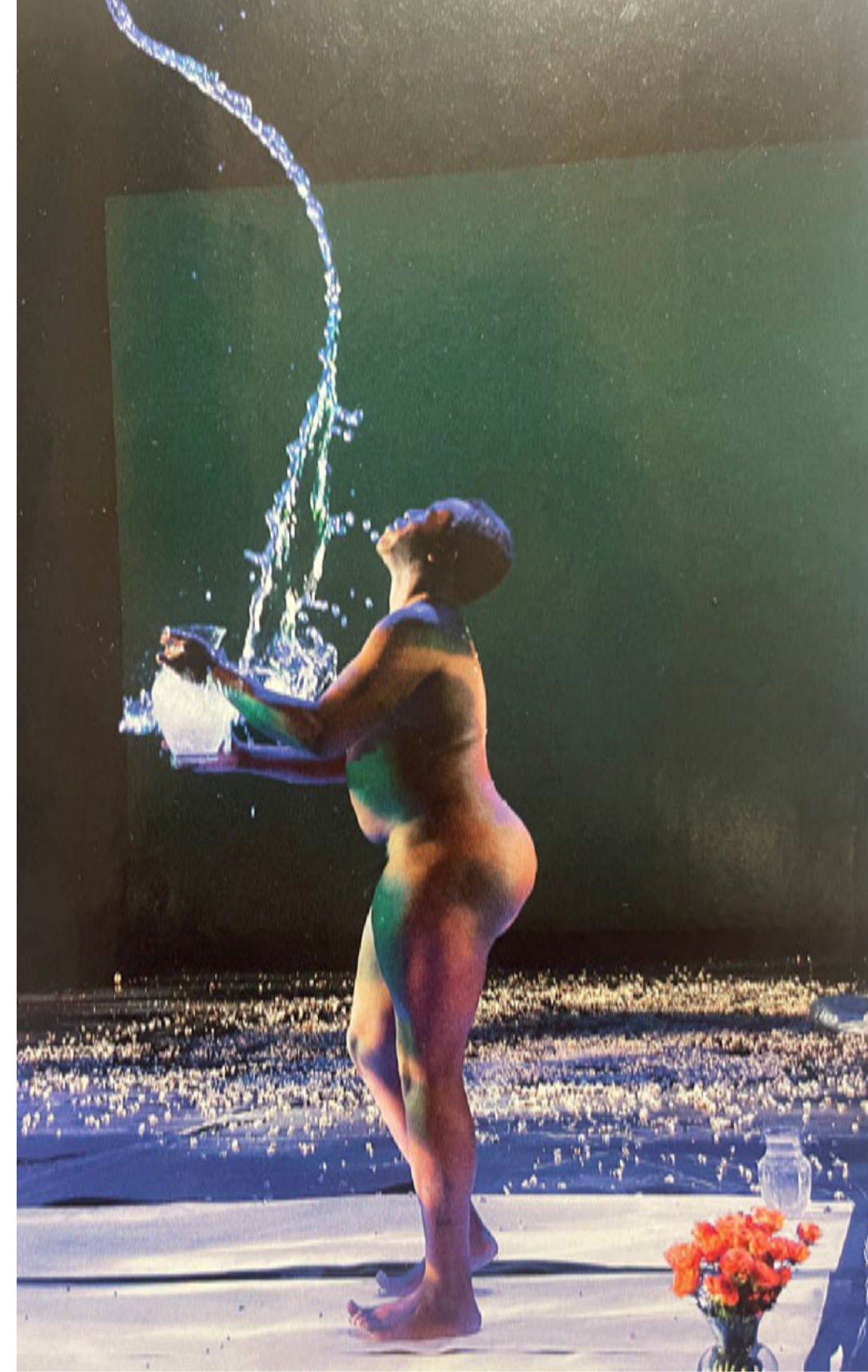
HE IS KILLED AS A SCAPEGOAT BUT REBORN: Brontez Purnell and Nijinsky's 'The Rite of Spring'

by BRONTEZ PURNELL

I had got a call from the beautiful and stunning Zari Le'on, (whose work and presence I had admired for a decade plus). She said she had read some of my books and got inspired. In her cool Black girl Cali cadence she said to me, "Do you want to come train with me and do Nijinsky's 'The Rite of Spring'?!?" I was like, "Wait, holy shit, GIRL, WHAT?!?!?" I am one to NEVER turn down a challenge...shots fired, it was ON.

I had met Le'on some decade before, when she taught a Dunham workshop at Laney College that had COMPLETELY blown me away. I had started my dance journey AT Laney College, as a Dunham student, and ballet student. I had learned under Danny Nguyen, Lynette DeFazio, Lynn Coles, and had got a scholarship to dance with Colette Eloi, danced in her contemporary Haitian company for about 8 years. But it was around the time that I saw Le'on's Dunham demo, and the Katherine Dunham seminar at Laney, that I was transfixed by the fact of how new it felt. I had only danced with conga drummers. Seeing her connect the tenets of the routine with a single solo electric violin player and two dancers condensed a lot for me aesthetically. I had always thrust my body into dance backed by a pulsating drum beat, at the time made a good part of my money go-go dancing in this band Gravy Train!!! And worked the go-go box at the time at too many underground clubs to recall. What I mean to say is, my body had always acclimated to dance being associated with a very loud noise. This felt eloquent.

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN



I said to Le'on, "Abso-fucking-LOUTELY! But like, you know I'm old and fat now? And haven't been in a ballet class in 2 years?!" (She said we would work on it).

Now let me be clear, I have always been a spooky Witch boy who LOVES a séance, a dedication, and a conjuring. When I was making "Unstoppable Feat: The Dances of ED MOCK" (my documentary about the late Ed Mock) what I realized was that there is this kind spiritual work in trying to recover a language of the past—it's like studying a personal form of hieroglyphics—the work always feels like some form of spiritual intervention you are putting on yourself. Certainly not for the weak of heart. But also, "The Rite of Spring" wasn't just any ballet. It was the rallying call of what the work of dance would be the rest of last century. Nijinsky humping that nymph's veil on stage said to the world, "I am about to make a ugly thing, very beautiful" OR maybe it said "I'm going to make a beautiful thing, very ugly." Either way, both statements are important—the key word here: transformation.

Did I also mention that I am one of the most horrible ballet dancers that has ever existed on the face of the planet?

I remember being 26 years-old and a male ballet teacher stopping me in class and said, (while I was at a barre routine), “*Child, you are so far behind the others... how do you EVER expect to dance professionally?!*”

Two very STRONG thoughts crossed my mind at the time.

1. Who the fuck said I wanted to “dance professionally”?! I was taking ballet cause like, I don’t know, I just wanted to feel pretty. And also...
- 2 I thought to myself, “Am I about to like, traumatize these teenage ballet dancers when I beat this dude’s ass for talking CRAZY to me?” (I went to the dressing room and cried instead.)

Now cut to present day, when I say “fat and old” I don’t mean these as apologetic statements. I just have to reckon with the fact that sometime during quarantine, my knees do a nosedive, and turning 40 changed the landscape of my body. THAT SAID, Le’on had said something to me that sparked so much courage: “You just simply have to come back to class and put the geometry of ballet back in your body.”

THERE. THERE WAS THE THING I NEEDED TO HEAR.

I can’t explain it, but all through my 20s and 30s the physical act of dancing ballet was something I could never quite “feel”—but after a long absence, when I’m at home just playing by myself, a tendu is something I can now finally intellectually and physically connect to my entire hip (it was something I feel like I spent years just muscling through), the subtle invisible line that ballet sets to poetically integrate into one’s body is DEFINITELY THERE. It’s like the years of language is finally catching up to me as my body system seems to go the other way. But I do think all those years of struggle with ballet did this thing: when I said “I took ballet to ‘feel pretty’” it was actually a prayer for my future self—that it taught me how to lift myself gracefully but more so, how to *fall* with grace.

I think of two versions of this.

The plan is to work with Le’on on a recreation of the original but sometime around next year a Brontez Purnell Dance Company version of “The Rite of Spring” to be set in Paris next October- near fashion week- with costuming by Collin Strata NYC.

Now let me be clear here, I have NO CLUE what I’m doing. There even feels something kind of antagonistic about calling it “a ballet.” In all my movement work I have always worked in a deconstructionist mode of dance. When I started Brontez Purnell Dance Company with Sophia Wang in 2009 we were described as mixing “punk



rock subversion with free jazz improvisation” – I say to you with great humility that my branding has always felt both blessing and curse to me, but I digress.

I do think there comes a point, where for a dancer like myself, mounting “The Rite of Spring” is a graduation, or a homecoming of sorts — like a Silver Anniversary of myself starting a journey with dance. I do, as I return to the barre, hold a kind of excitement. Remember: I am from that crunchy granola school of Bay Area dance, that in the mission statement was always “dance is NOT about how you look, but about how you FEEL.” And for this dance what I FEEL like doing is privileging my love and *unlearning* of a form, the bad knees be damned.

BRONTEZ PURNELL is an American writer, musician, dancer and director based out of Oakland, California. He is the author of several books, including *Since I Laid My Burden Down* (2017) and *Johnny Would You Love Me If My Dick Were Bigger* (2015). He is the frontman for the punk band The Younger Lover and founder of the Brontez Purnell Dance Company. Purnell received the 2022 Lambda Literary Award for Gay Fiction for his latest novel *100 Boyfriends* (2021). His upcoming poetry volume *10 Bridges I’ve Burned* comes out on MCDxFSG in February.

PHOTO BY BRANNY PECK

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DANCING EARTH CELEBRATES THEIR 20 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

by EMILY LEVANG

RULAN TANGEN was on death's door as she dreamed of Dancing Earth. She could barely recognize her own body as she battled stage-four cancer, hardly able to move, let alone dance. Yet in that liminal space between realms, Rulan was grateful to still be breathing, and in this dream-space she visioned Dancing Earth – an offering borne as a thank you to life. This year, Dancing Earth celebrates their 20-year anniversary, as Rulan honors the strength and empowerment that this moment represents.

Dancing Earth creates elemental ritual and dance performances grounded in the ancestral, land-based wisdom of contemporary global people. With hubs in the Bay Area and Santa Fe, and a widening international cultural exchange in the Amazon, Colombia, Mexico and other countries worldwide, Dancing Earth prioritizes equitable exchange between local cultures and artists. Working with grassroots communities, Rulan says they have created an “inclusive belonging space for the people who are dancing for the Earth, with the Earth and as the Earth.” As director, Rulan is passionate about cultivating “real living relationships that honor the special unique qualities that each individual brings, culturally and creatively.”



recently attended one of Dancing Earth’s offerings – [The Source, 4-Day Festival](#) in the Bay Area co-curated by Elaine Talamaivo and Gabriel Carrion-Gonzales. At this immersive community ritual and performance experience, I received an embodied transmission of the world that is possible – one of deep reciprocity with the Earth and with one another. I’ve been grateful to talk with members of the Dancing Earth team and their collaborators, to learn more about the seeds they’ve been planting over two decades. One theme stands out: this is much more than a dance company.

Alex Meraz was an original founding dancer with the company in 2004, and is now a celebrated actor and director, known for his roles in the *Twilight Saga*, *Suicide Squad*, and more. At 19, Alex was bagging groceries at Whole Foods after having recently moved to San Francisco. He’d grown up break dancing near the Reservation in Mesa, Arizona. He’d never auditioned for anything, and was a bit

nervous. “I think Rulan saw I was this rough kind of urban kid, tore up jeans and a hoodie. So she played an old school hip hop song. And I just started break dancing.” Alex was welcomed into the company, and the next day actor and Dancing Earth collaborator Raoul Trujillo invited him to dance in the movie *The New World*. Alex says, “When I think about Rulan, when I think about Dancing Earth, it doesn’t feel like a dance company to me. It feels like in many ways they saved my life. They came at the perfect time, and told me beautiful, encouraging words at a time that I needed it. They gave me my career.”

Alex says this foundation as a dancer has been integral to his acting. “Rulan was getting us into our bodies, to find an element, and really express the element through our bodies. ‘Cause you know, we *are* the earth. So it was really just connecting us back to traditional views. It was figuring out a way to honor that same expression.”

Since its inception, Dancing Earth has always welcomed the wisdom of each dancer’s ancestral knowledge,

rather than emphasizing specific body types or ways of moving that originate in the dominant culture.

Sarah Hogland-Gurulé has been with the company for three years, and is the director of *UNBOUND*, a performance ritual that honors the cast’s ancestors. Together with dancers Lupita Salazar and Gabriel Carrion-Gonzales, and producer Angel Guanajuato, their performance educates communities about the suppressed history of the Genízaros – Native people who were enslaved by Spanish colonizers. Sarah says, “I feel deeply encouraged by Dancing Earth to be guided by my intuition and to work with the ways of knowing and creating that were a normal part of culture for many of my ancestors but are often diminished, not taken seriously or even laughed at by the dominating culture of today.”

For Dancing Earth, celebrating diverse lineages is an act of honoring biodiversity: when humans dance, we are the earth dancing. This principle is central to all choreography. Ronice (“Ro”) Stratton



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is a dancer in the emergent Bay Area company. During the development of their production of *Eco-Elegies*, Ro researched the Bay Area’s watershed, created movement based on that, and shared her embodied learning with fellow dancers, which was incorporated into the performance ritual. Ro says, “Dancing Earth has been a beautiful place for me to feel agency in my dance and my expression.”

“This is a reflection of the natural world,” says Taraneh Sarrafzadeh, “that not everyone is expected to fill the same niche or express themselves in the same way. That’s embracing biodiversity.”

Taraneh is a dancer with the Bay Area company, and joins the artist-leadership cooperative team with focus on grant writing, as well as producing *Eco-Elegies*. At the first [Dancing Earth Summer Institute](#) she attended in 2022, she spent time in the desert, learning directly from chosen kin, and integrating that into her performance. She says, “it opened up a lot for me to have a dedicated time and space to be with a juniper tree for

an hour and then see what my body absorbed from that relationship.”

After 20 years, and thanks to community, in-kind support, and grants, Dancing Earth has been able to expand. The practice of shared visioning that has been foundational to choreography is now expanding into the organizational realm. The past three years have marked a shift in Dancing Earth’s work, as they’ve been able to have consistent, part time staff, rather than working on a project basis. This enables broadening leadership in creative visioning and management of the company which they hope to continue with sustainable funding sources.

As Dancing Earth enters its third decade, Rulan intends to continue exploring the emerging theme of “mixed-icism,” which is the basis for their new *Eco-Elegies* performance. “Mixed-icism” inhabits the liminal space of “in between,” exploring the confluence of mixedness in lineage, citizenship, gender, sexuality, skin color, artistic discipline and more. An expansion on

the long-standing themes of Dancing Earth, at the core, mixed-icism is about “acknowledging yourself as a person who’s carrying mixedness.” Rulan says, “For myself as a dream visionary, I personally want to delve into being more than a box check.”

Rulan holds this work as a way of standing *for* life, for what we want to see in this world. Many of her mentors have taught her that the “particular power of dance, embodiment and movement is to show not only what you’re fighting against, but what you’re standing for, what you’re dreaming into being. It’s about embodying a future of balance by showing it on stage, and then actually making it the present reality.”

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