

Solo Form: Nora Chipaumire

by LAURA ELAINE ELLIS



I WAIT IN GREAT ANTICIPATION for Nora Chipaumire's homecoming...her San Francisco Bay Area premiere of *Miriam* at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum February 13-15, 2014. To witness Nora perform is to see pure energy, heart and soul on stage. I look forward to experiencing what Nora has created because she is never afraid to venture into new territory, to question, to challenge. That courageous spirit is at the core of what Nora brings to all that she does and that brought her to San Francisco, nearly fifteen years ago. We spent many, many hours together in dance studios creating and rehearsing and burning up the stage performing with Dimensions Dance Theater and Anne Bluethenthal and Dancers. Nora danced in a variety of Bay Area projects, like my dance work *Quilt Project: Pieces Of Me* (2002), in works by Robert Moses and she shared the stage with artists like Robert Henry Johnson, Wayne Wallace and Marc Bamuthi Joseph. I was one of Nora's sister/friend encouraging her, in those early years, when she was creating solo work, developing her choreographic voice and honing her craft. I loved viewing the impromptu showings she gave in that odd-shaped studio at Mills College in Oakland, seeing her gorgeous self take up all the space of the Temescal Arts Center, and watching other folks be in awe of Nora when she performed in venues like ODC Theater's Pilot Series, Summerfest's West Wave Dance Festival, or the AfroSolo festival!

That same courageous spirit took Nora to New York City to dance with Urban Bush Women. While in New York, Nora continued creating her own solo projects – gaining national and international acclaim, winning awards, travelling and accepting prestigious residencies. In 2007, the first time Nora came back to San Francisco, Rob Bailis, then director of ODC Theater, commissioned Nora's piece, *Chimurenga*. Nora captivated the audience; drew us in with the provocative storytelling in that work. In a review of *Chimurenga*, journalist Rachel Howard wrote: "I don't think anyone breathed during the last twenty minutes of *Chimurenga*, Zimbabwe-born Nora Chipaumire's one woman show. You could feel the audience grow rigid with suspense as her entrancingly roiling shoulders gave way to joyous African shakings and stomps, as she stood at the front of the stage shouting ugly epithets—"kaffir," "woolie"—that slowly morphed into softly whispered remembrances—the smell of rain on sand, the taste of Mazowe orange juice. That last item brought knowing hisses of "yes" from the fellow Zimbabwe natives present at ODC Theater, a final burst of release. The standing ovation was immediate."

Nora returns to the San Francisco Bay Area to perform *Miriam*, a dance-theater piece she created in collaboration with other amazing artists—composer Omar Sosa, lighting and visual designer Olivier Clause and actor/dancer, Okwui Okpokwasili. YBCA Director of Performing Arts, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, wisely chose the YBCA Forum to present this unique work, which is described as "a deeply personal and immersive dance-theater installation." Nora has created a dance-theater work that challenges — she delved deep into the realm of risk-taking — daring the audience to come along. Nora Chipaumire, the choreographer/performer, is like Nora...the person: unique, bold, earthy, courageous, complex...REAL. Nora shared with me some of her thoughts about why she chooses to work in the "solo-form," her inspiration for this dance-theater work, *Miriam*, and what it feels like to return to the Bay Area to perform:

Laura Elaine Ellis (LEE): You have been creating and performing powerful solo works for over 15 years now—why do you prefer solo work over creating works for a company of dancers?

Nora Chipaumire (NC): The life project of becoming subject; and not object...or having the choice between subject or object is why I make dances, why I dance my own work, why I am committed to the solo form. The solo form is to me the equivalent of self-portraiture and the self-portrait in of itself is never complete, it defies completeness, it refuses to be complete.

It is true that I prefer the solo form to "company work," although in creating work on other bodies, I have discovered WORDS. The process of transmitting my thoughts onto another body encourages me to utilize the spoken language. This humbling process is necessary, perhaps as necessary as occasionally becoming a body or object in other choreographers' works.

LEE: Not too long ago you and I were hanging out in New York and I saw you performing at a very cool event at the Baryshnikov Arts Center. It was interesting because you challenged yourself to experience another choreographer's process and approach to developing movement. How challenging was that for you and did that experience impact or inform your work or artistic process?

NC: Naturally I view the process of working as a "body" for other choreographers as a process of becoming object. A process of attempting to realize someone else's portrait. I hope you can imagine the challenge objectifying process presents. I partake of it, because I often need the distance it provides me from my own self investigations. Though like fish to water, I must return to the environment that feeds me the most.

LEE: *Miriam*—like many of your works—is personal, yet relatable. What is the journey or story that frames/inspires this particular work?

NC: In *Miriam*, I was interested (as I am in all my work) in how I am personally implicated. *Miriam* was inspired by Miriam Makeba, Mary mother of Jesus, Miriam, the sister of Moses. Female Icons whom, taken together, represent the ideal woman; fearless, beautiful, talented...

The Mary(s) represent what I would like...what I wish for myself, that I believe every woman dreams... etc... etc...

LEE: Developing *Miriam*, you worked with a stellar group of collaborators. Share what it was like for you—a solo artist—creating in a collective?

NC: In building work such as *Miriam*, the contradictions of self-portraiture versus the collective communal existence become transparent. However, I believe the best of the two worlds were forced to unite...collide in the singularity of my vision, against the dynamism of the collective.

LEE: And our brother/friend Omar Sosa—we both know what an amazing person he is to work with—please share a bit about what he brought to the process?

NC: Omar, a singular artist brought curiosity, virtuosity and love to the work...as did Okwui (Okpokwasili) and Olivier (Clause). I think the power dynamic, which I escape in working alone, is and creates an environment that is extremely charged. Questions of leadership, as well as bending to the will of the work, has to be considered. At the end of the day, I am taught new ways of hearing, seeing...shaping...which I bring back into my solitary practice of the solo.

LEE: So, you are performing *Miriam*—a San Francisco Bay Area premiere—at YBCA Forum, in association with the Black Choreographers Festival's 10 year anniversary. What does it feel like - coming back to the Bay Area to perform this dance-theatre piece?

NC: The Bay Area is home...not dissimilar to the way Harare (Zimbabwe) is home to me. Both taught me lessons that are embodied in my work. Returning to the Bay Area is as mixed with anxiety and joy as returning to Harare is. I would like to think that I have made those who raised me proud, at the same time I would like to think I have tried to surpass them. Acceptance and rejection, two sides of the same coin, make home an unsafe place. But clearly home is both a place and an idea that we all must return to...wrestle with.

LEE: Well, it would be great to see you develop a project here in San Francisco - through an extended residency...perhaps. I miss you girl...the Bay Area misses you! Could you see yourself having an extended stay in the Bay?

NC: A residency is as welcome as the visa to leave.

LEE: Yes! Indeed!!!

Laura Elaine Ellis is Executive Director of the African & African American Performing Arts Coalition, co-presenters of the Black Choreographers Festival: Here & Now. She is on faculty of the Theater & Dance Dept. of California State University, East Bay and the Athenian School and a principal dancer with Dimensions Dance Theater and Anne Bluethenthal & Dancers. Ellis serves on the Boards of CounterPULSE Theater, Robert Moses' Kin and Oakland Jazz Workshops.

YBCA PRESENTS A BAY AREA PREMIERE NORA CHIPAUMIRE: *Miriam* in Association with the Black Choreographers Festival

Miriam is a deeply personal and immersive dance-theater installation that reverberates with tensions between public expectations and private desires, between objectification and power and between darkness and light. The inspiration for *Miriam* springs from the cultural and political milieu of Chipaumire's southern African girlhood, her self-exile to the US, and her self-discovery as an artist. The unusual format and staging of the piece invite the audience to bring their senses, memories, hearts and minds to bear to fully inhabit and comprehend the experience of being an outsider.

Thu-Sat, Feb 13-15, 8pm
YBCA Forum, 701 Mission St, San Francisco
Produced by MAPP International Productions
Tickets: General: \$30 in Advance / \$35 at the Door
Student, Senior, Teacher: \$25 in Advance / \$30 at the Door
YBCA Members: \$25 / YBCA:You FREE

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in dance



Nora Chipaumire
Feb 13-15 / Photo
by Antoine Tempe
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Membership

Whether a fan, supporter or member of Dancers' Group, our resources and services are a direct benefit of your involvement in our community.

Find a more detailed breakdown at dancersgroup.org.

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Information about how to register online at dancersgroup.org

Jan/Feb 2014



Blind Tiger Society, Feb 28-Mar 2 / Photo by Roel Q. Sebeer



(Right) Sangam Arts / Photo by Suri Narayanan See pg 7

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Welcome

THE PERENNIAL CRAVING for new beginnings—creative, practical, success or health-based—are abundantly present at the start of each new year. This universal desire to move forward comprises the imaginative impulses that artists compose daily. I'm already thankful for the marvelous productions that are soon to abound, and I look forward to all that lies ahead personally and professionally. The dance community's onward trajectory will assuredly provide the inevitable surprise that garner awards of all kinds, while providing a plethora of poignant moments.

Our latest endeavors will always be influenced by our experiences, and this past year has provided me with some indelible instances that continue to influence my life/work/dance viewing. Last June, I was blessed to be part of Amara Tabors-Smith's epic dance that paid tribute to our beloved teacher Ed Mock. The memories resonate deeply, such as: dancing with Joanna Haigood and Shakiri; hearing stories of Ed and a city struggling to embrace the horror of AIDS; and so many of these moments were revealed through Marvin K. White's oratorical conjuring that guided performers and audience over the five-hour travelling ambition of loss, love, inspiration and the desire to pay tribute and connect with our elders. Marvin is one of many in the dance community who are acknowledged with an Izzie nomination. On page 15, you can read about all the artists and organizations who are being recognized with nominations.

A variety of innovative undertakings are also featured within. Our lead story covers the expansion of Joanne Haigood's decades-long work with aerial arts in San Francisco's Bayview/Hunters Point district that will provide additional opportunities to study a form she has helped nurture and redefine.

Major activity is taking place at Ballet San Jose with the appointment of José Manuel Carreño, a former American Ballet Theatre star who retired from the stage in 2011. Claudia Bauer delves into the back-story of what transpired to place Carreño at the helm of the South Bay institution while creating ties to ABT's repertory, costumes and ballet curriculum that is now being taught at BSJ's school.

Another testament to a deepening of dance in our community is the expanding forums that acknowledge the range, depth and quality of work here. There is the long standing Isadora Duncan Dance Awards (Izzies) that currently has amassed the largest annual list of honorees. Complementing the Izzies is the 7th annual Dancers Choice Award that is accepting nominations through January 15. Then, the newly formed LiveBlessay event, created by BayAreaDanceWatch, that has as its mission "to honor the local dancers and dance leaders with a professional, creative awards show that rises to the level of the artistic endeavors of the artists themselves." This event will take place on January 12. Many other award events transpire throughout the year, like World Arts West's lifetime achievement awards and Jo Kreiter's tribute to Women. These nominations and award-giving speaks to a community rich in dance that understands the importance of acknowledging our successes.

May your 2014 be filled with sparkle—along with a good dose of loving laughter—that supplies you with generous, evocative, heroic, happy, dynamic and seriously good thoughts.

—Wayne Hazzard

FACT/SF's New Commissioning Program JuMP: Balancing Breadth and Depth

by KATIE GAYDOS

OFTEN WHEN THERE ISN'T an ideal opportunity at hand, you have to create one for yourself. In that vein, FACT/SF founder and Artistic Director Charles Slender has recently created a new commissioning program, JuMP (short for Just Make a Piece), that will provide the resources for an artist to—like the name suggests—simply make a piece.

As a certified Countertechnique teacher, a UC Berkeley English Literature/Dance graduate and an ambitious and thoughtful choreographer, Slender understands how balance works. It makes sense, then, that his approach to dance seeks lasting support in a climate in which many see only instability.

He explains, "One of the priorities in starting FACT/SF was to design a company that I would be happy to dance for and to create an environment for dancers that would be fulfilling, rewarding, nourishing and healthy. Not that it wasn't about making work, that part is obvious, of course a choreographer starts a company to make their own work. But, how can you create a company that places the value of the individuals alongside the value of work—and not as a secondary priority?"

"THIS IS AN ALTERNATIVE TO JUST INVITING SOMEONE WE ALREADY KNOW AND LIKE..."
—Charles Slender

Having recently celebrated FACT/SF's five year anniversary, Slender—while still as dedicated to creating equitable work environments and rigorous creative processes as ever—is taking the time to slow things down a bit. He remarks, "I'm realizing that the trajectory of a company is more like running a marathon than a 100 meter dash. I'm now curious about how we can do fewer things and do them better."

In planning for the next five years, Slender and Operations

Manager Jeanne Pfeffer began brainstorming ways to expand the company's artistic exchange in a sustainable and enriching way. Slender explains, "We thought about what the Bay Area community had, and what it needed. We thought about what we would benefit from now, and what we would have benefited from just a few years ago. What emerged was the rather basic idea to utilize our company structure to support one choreographer in the creation of one new work."

Thus the idea for JuMP was conceived to provide the resources, time, space and exchange for an artist to make a new work. The selected artist's piece (performed by FACT/SF) will be presented alongside a new work by Slender in November 2014 at ODC Theater. Planning to repeat JuMP every year, Slender hopes to make the program a stable fixture in the local dance community.

This year the application process for the inaugural round of JuMP will open January 6 and close February 7. A small group of finalists will be invited for interviews and given the opportunity (and a small stipend) to work with the FACT/SF dancers for a few hours to get a feel for the environment they would be stepping into. Out of that smaller pool of artists, one choreographer will be selected by February 28 to work with the FACT/SF dancers over a 10-week period (Sep-Nov 2014).

Employing an RFP/application, Slender and Pfeffer hope to learn about artists previously unknown to them and hear how various, potentially under the radar, choreographers are articulating their approaches to making work. Slender explains,



FACT/SF
/ Photo by Kegan Marling

"This is an alternative to just inviting someone we already know and like...it seemed more democratic, more interesting and more comprehensive."

Having submitted numerous applications himself, and often feeling frustrated by having to argue for peripheral aspects of a project that seem unrelated to the actual work, Slender aims to make the application process as relevant as possible. In addition to sending in a work sample, the JuMP application will simply ask about the work that the artist makes, the work they want to make, and what they think they would get out of the program.

The program will give priority to local artists who haven't had substantial opportunity or funding in the past. Slender is open to all kinds of aesthetics. He explains, "I'd love it if their work was

» Continued on page 12

2014 San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival Audition

Fri-Sun, Jan 10-12, 2014, Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley

The San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival auditions offer the greatest opportunity to experience the wide range of dance styles that are thriving throughout Northern California. This January, over the course of three days, artists from 91 dance companies will present their very best work in full costume, and many will have live musical accompaniment. These artists will be presenting dance from cultures around the world, hoping to be one of the groups chosen for the 2014 Festival. The auditions offer a rare opportunity to see some 25 performances each day that span the globe, including sizzling flamenco, fancy trick roping from the American Southwest, thrilling Mexican folkloric dances, Bollywood-inspired Indian dance and much, much more.

For a complete listing of all companies participating in the auditions and for more information, visit worldartswest.org or call 415-474-3914.

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Fri, Jan 3–Sun, Jan 19

FRESH Festival 2014 kickstarts the new year with an abundance of body-based art, action and interaction facilitated by some of the San Francisco Bay Area's finest experimental dance and performance makers, masters and upstarts. FRESH fills two+ weeks with performance, training, discourse and community events, gathering local, national and international participants and audiences to activate the individual body, the local and extended community, and the generation and regeneration of new perspectives, practices and points of view.

This year's festival is centered on change. As we live, work and make-work in the Bay Area, we are experiencing a radical shift—displacement, confabulation, re-branding—in the pursuit of progress and perfecting interpersonal relationships. With the focus on technology, science and the math of money, we ask...What about the body? What about art? What about tangible community with talk and touch, face and flesh? How do we interact in these aspects to realize and manifest who we are and what our full potential is?

Festival schedule online at artsbuildingconsortium.org
» See ad on page 6 for more information.

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Rotunda Dance Series Announces the 2014 Season

Bringing many of the Bay Area's most celebrated dance companies to San Francisco City Hall, the Rotunda Dance Series is thrilled to announce the artists presenting performances throughout 2014. Set amidst the grandeur of San Francisco City Hall's Rotunda, these FREE lunchtime presentations bring dance forms from across the globe to this magnificent venue. All performances begin at 12noon.

The Rotunda Dance Series 2014 Dance Companies:

- March 7: Gamelan Sekar Jaya
- April 4: Diamano Coura West African Dance Company
- May 2: La Tania Baile Flamenco Company (part of Bay Area Dance Week)
- June 5: Opening of the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival
- August 1: Dohee Lee
- September 5: Garrett + Moulton Productions
- October 3: Dimensions Dance Theater
- November 7: Fall Festival Feature Performance
- December 5: Sean Dorsey Dance

Dancers' Group and World Arts West present the Rotunda Dance Series, in partnership with San Francisco Grants for the Arts and San Francisco City Hall dancersgroup.org/rotunda

Lighting Artists in Dance Award

Through the Lighting Artists in Dance Award, Dancers' Group is pleased to support lighting designers working in the field of dance. Now in its seventh year, this program engages and supports the development of emerging, mid-career and established Bay Area lighting designers working in partnership with a choreographer or dance company towards the presentation of a public performance.

- Applications must be emailed by 5pm, Fri, Feb 28, 2014.
- Download guidelines and application form at dancersgroup.org

Black Choreographers Festival: Here & Now ~ 2014

An annual event, now in its 10th year of community programming and activities. Co-presented by Bay Area non-profits, AAAPAC and K*Star*Productions, since 2005, BCF has served local, national, and international artists, presenting over 150 public events, acknowledging the diverse artistic expression within the context of African and African American dance and culture. BCF's 10-year celebration will be presented with a host of community partners, including Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, ODC Theater, Dimensions Dance Theater, Dance Mission Theater and Laney College Theater. BCF is a comprehensive event that incorporates related components of performances, mentoring, master classes, workshops and special events. BCF is made possible through the generous support of the San Francisco Arts Commission, the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, City of Oakland's Cultural Arts Funding and the Zellerbach Family Foundation.

Performance listings online at bcfhereandnow.com

BayAreaDanceWatch & SAFEhouse for the Arts present LiveBlessay 2013

Sun, Jan 12, 6pm Reception; 7pm Award Show, Free
ODC Theater, 3153 17th St, SF

LiveBlessay was created by BayAreaDanceWatch to honor the local dancers and dance leaders with a professional, creative awards show that rises to the level of the artistic endeavors of the artists themselves.

LiveBlessay 2013 will honor artists and their works created during the entire year of 2013. Six local dance groups/individual artists have been commissioned to perform live at the event: Pearl Marill, Carte Blanche, Kathy Mata Ballet, Farima Berenji (Farima Dance), Aaron Jessup & lu-Hui Chua and Bandelion with Eric Kuper (Dandelion Dance).

In addition to these artists more than a dozen local individual artists have been commissioned to assist with entertainment. Throughout the evening, there will be many artistic surprises during both the reception and the awards show – plus interactive experiences; prizes to take home; food and beverages and a live feed of the awards show displayed in the lobby for any overflow audience.

RSVP requests can be made by contacting Jim Tobin:
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