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Month-long Digital Dance Festival 'Remotely Yours' begins May 4

by [Bonnie Rosenstock](#)
May 1, 2020

New York, NY

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The New Dance Alliance Performance Mix Festival #34, scheduled for June 4 to 7 at University Settlement on the Lower East Side in New York City, was cancelled due to Covid-19. The mission of NDA, incorporated in 1989, is to promote emerging forms of innovative dance, music, video and interdisciplinary performance. As a response to the shutdown, NDA rededicated their commitment to the participating local, national and international artists with Remotely Yours, a re-imagined month-long digital initiative from May 4 to 31. Instead of dancers having just one shot in the spotlight during the live festival, they will each have their own day to go wherever their creativity takes them, whether a new piece, a work in progress, posts of past performances, or even writings, readings, illustrations or photographs. It is, as The New York Times noted, "the most elaborate festival of the unpredictable." Livestreams begin daily at noon.

I spoke by phone with four participating dancers, who described the challenges of creating, finances, keeping physically and emotionally fit and just living their lives during this extraordinary time.

Nami Yamamoto (Week 1, Performance May 9) is planning to list three works: a finished piece from 2017; a section of last year's work in progress; and a new three-minute video clip of her and her 10-year-old daughter going about their daily routine. "Every day, I'm just up and down," she said, referring to the emotional roller coaster of sheltering in place as well as not being able to continue developing her work in progress for four dancers, including herself.

Yamamoto was teaching at a high school through Movement Research's Dance Makers, which bring dance artists to schools, but that was cancelled. She believes a dance residency has also been cancelled. However, she has been asked by a pre-K and K teacher to assist in making video lessons. Her husband is still working, considered an essential worker at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where his company normally manufactures military gear but is now engaged in producing medical gowns. "He goes to work every day," she said. "It's hard, but a good thing." They live in a cramped rent-stabilized apartment on the Lower East Side, so space for physical activity is at a premium. "I take

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Feldenkrais classes,” she said, “so I don’t have to move around very much.”

Remi Harris and Mark Schmidt (Week 2, Performance May 17) have been working on their current collaboration for two years. They were planning to perform live with DJ Tiffany Pilgrim, aka, Krunk Pony, and end with a dance party and invite the audience to dance with them. “We’re thinking of other ways of bringing the community together at this time,” said Harris. “We talked about using Zoom and having sessions together where we dance at the same time and what else we can share with others that’s not only based on the performance. It’s been fun and challenging,” she said.

“We considered having the DJ do a live set, but we’re not sure if we’re able to do that,” Harris added. “We were also talking about having an improvisational score that we follow. The DJ improvises, and we respond to her improvisation and vice versa, using a play list that we all enjoy, with different tempos, different kinds of house music, disco and soul.”

Schmidt said they are also going to show photos and videos covering the last year and a half. “It’ll be a way for us to share a little bit of history through video and the most recent manifestation in December.”

So far, Harris has been kept on at her part-time job with a non-profit as a curator and dance programmer. However, as a freelance dancer/choreographer, all of her dance gigs have dried up. “Future projects are a question mark now,” she said. They did a recent virtual interaction with Judson Church, which was supposed to be a live performance but shifted to an online platform. As a non-profit like NAD, they had funding already, so they were able to get paid.

However, she doesn’t know if she qualifies for partial unemployment benefits. “The website is a hot mess,” she said. Schmidt said that it’s complicated if you’re a freelancer. “You don’t quite fit into any category neatly.” He works with an athletic trainer in a physical therapy office that is keeping them on a little less than part time so they can maintain their benefits. He also does personal training, now online, but doesn’t have as many clients as before.

The Barbados-born Harris came to Brooklyn with her parents at age one and has remained there ever since. She is sheltering in place with her partner in Richwood, Queens. The apartment has enough space so she can move around, she said, but it’s not the same as a studio. Her daily physical activity varies, depending on her mood. “I take long walks and movement classes online,” she said. “I haven’t been this inactive dance wise ever, unless I’ve been injured. I want to move more, but sometimes I don’t have the capacity or intent to do it.”

New York City dweller Schmidt is staying upstate with friends. “My friend’s house is big enough, so the four of us can be in a different room and work,” he noted. His friend is running a community kitchen for families in need, so he’s been busy cooking. But like Harris, he hasn’t been moving as much. “The motivation isn’t the same as before,” he admits. While editing a past video, Schmidt had to laugh. “I haven’t danced in so long that watching the video reconfirmed for me that I do know how to dance.”

Cynthia McLaughlin and Company (Week 3, Performance May 22) consist of McLaughlin, four performers and a sound designer. They were originally researching and rehearsing a work in progress for NAD, but they had to put it aside. “It was based on childhood game structures, like red light, green light. Now we’re shifting into something that’s more like how to do something simple in your home, like how to brush your teeth, how to do your laundry, make pasta. All those voices collaborating together to try to explain a thing that should be simple while unable to be together to communicate the way we usually like to.”

McLaughlin is at her home in Colrain, a rural town in western MA with her husband and three children, two of whom returned home from college. “Working and schooling together,” she said. “Fascinating.”

As an Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Dance at Keene State College in Keene, NH, she hasn’t experienced any financial loss. She is teaching virtually and making plans for the fall. However, her department had to cancel a major production at the college, which they had been working on since the beginning of the year. “There are lots of different contingency plans as to how classes or productions might happen,” she said. Her husband is a website designer and is working from home.

For fun, she created a crowd source, Dance Lives in the Body, and reached out to alumni, friends of dance and those who do not identify as dancers. “I received a huge response,” she said. “I will share it next Friday. We’ll have it archived somewhere.”

Because she lives far from the madding crowd, she’s used to doing a lot on her own. However, she finds life in quarantine physically, mentally and spiritually demanding. “Suddenly not being in a dance studio, it’s really challenging,” she said. “I laid out an area of my kitchen where I work every day. I’m doing Gaga classes every morning at 9 a.m. and put a sign on the door, ‘Please give me some space to work.’ Within a few weeks of jogging with her son, however, she injured her ankle. “I am working in ways my body wasn’t used to,” she said. “All of my systems for care are unavailable.”

“But as dancers we are pretty resilient and adaptive,” she declared.

To access *Remotely Yours*, go to facebook.com/newdancealliance or
Instagram: [@newdancealliance](https://instagram.com/newdancealliance)



Cynthia McLaughlin

Photo © & courtesy of Jim Coleman



Photo © & courtesy of Photographer Unknown



Mark Schmidt and Remi Harris

Photo © & courtesy of Jason River

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