



## Performance Mix Festival Celebrates 35th Anniversary

In the aftermath of the pandemic, artists are taking risks as they debut new works to in-person audiences

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MOLLY&NOLA. Photo: Nat Ward

In March of last year, Karen Bernard, founder and curator of New Dance Alliance, was preparing for the 34th year of performances at Performance Mix Festival. “We had our press release ready to go,” she explains, “and then the pandemic hit.”

Now, as the 35th year of the festival begins this weekend, artists from all over the country and around the globe are debuting work in person to audiences again. The Festival features live in-person performances, live streams, installations, and video/film screenings on the Lower East Side, at Movement Research at 122 Community Center in Movement Research studios, and the Courtyard at 122CC.



In the aftermath of the pandemic, Bernard is seeing more artists take risks with this year's festival performances. "Being outside, we have two installations, which are really unusual, and that wouldn't happen without being outside ... I'm just really happy with the way the artists are able to experiment, and be flexible."

MOLLY&NOLA, made up of artists Molly Ross and Nola Sporn Smith, was originally slated to perform at Performance Mix last year. Even after in-person performances were canceled, they felt the support of New Dance Alliance and Performance Mix. "They still offered payment," Ross explains, "and still offered a platform for us to share our work and to put our voices out there, even though it was through social media platforms." With help from a residency from New Dance Alliance this past winter, MOLLY&NOLA were able to put together their work for this year's festival.

By getting to perform in person now, both artists are looking forward to the opportunity to share their art not just with the audience, but with the artistic community that supported them. "It almost feels like a reunion," Smith says. "Even just to be curated, to have the work in conversation with each other, which is something that, during the pandemic, there hasn't really been. I hope it's time for folks to see each other's work, and to reconnect. This feels like a year-delayed chance to finally present our work in front of our community."

### **"Energy of the Space"**

Dancer Anh Vo's "non-binary pussy" performance will be the first time they perform in front of an audience. "I really don't know what it's gonna look like," they laugh. "I have a repertoire of movements I draw from, I have a repertoire of songs that I draw from. I feel like I just wait until the last minute to really take in the energy of the space, and the energy of the potential audience, for how it's gonna unfold."

With the opportunity to perform in front of people and interact with the audience for the first time, Vo wants to create a performance that allows for people to fully experience being in each other's space again. "I want that sort of communal space for people to really get transported in and out of the world. Stand up and sing with me! I really want to touch somebody! That sort of cross contamination, I want that contamination. Even the word 'pussy' feels like a contamination."

Sari Nordman, a Finnish New York City-based interdisciplinary artist working with dance, video, and installation, found herself out of work as the pandemic began. "I went back home to Finland for a little bit. It was safer in Finland, and I could go outside and take long walks." Her installation piece "Tower," displayed for the entire festival, is



inspired by nature, climate change, and the biblical story of Babel. “Nature is very important to me. And for Finland, it’s kind of like a spiritual place,” she explains. “I’ve also frequently traveled to Greece, and visiting these archaeological sites, there were many towers that have eroded, but don’t collapse. And in New York City, the landscape is full of towers.”

Nordmann is hopeful that with a live audience, the importance of art and artists will be appreciated the way that it has been virtually over the past year. “When I think about how I’ve gotten through the pandemic, I’ve watched so many YouTube videos on different artistic things,” she explains. “That’s really what has helped me get through this. And so I think about how much the art has actually helped us get through this time. Now we can meet and be in the same place, and I hope we can carry that love, and remember this time, and that it’s the arts that have been helping us in many ways.”

For Bernard, this year’s festival, after a rollercoaster year and last year’s cancellation, is a moment to savor not only for New Dance Alliance, but the community as a whole. “My hope is that people are really enlivened by our live performances. I know I will be.”

**Performance Mix Festival is running from June 10-13, tickets at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/performance-mix-35-festival-tickets-148495675563>.**

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