

## DAY IN THE LIFE OF DANCE: Artists at Work for the Performance Mix Festival at Abrons Arts Center



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CoCoMotion; Photo: Marisol Diaz-Gordon

This year, **New Dance Alliance** (NDA) presented its 40th **Performance Mix Festival** with a staggering lineup of 35+ artists across nine programs at Abrons Arts Center's Underground Theater. The festival, which is a veritable smorgasbord of experimental performance, happened to coincide with my own final outings in a radically different performance universe (the Metropolitan Opera's Turandot), and I didn't want to miss a thing. The artists whose performances I stood to miss were gracious enough to invite me to sit in on their tech rehearsals earlier in the week. This peek into their final preparations showed me glimpses of works that reflect each artist's unique creative mind and express what experimentation means to them.



Julia Antinozzi, "Tarantella" (in rehearsal June 1)

[Julia Antinozzi](#) loves dance. She loves steps and structures and patterns and rhythms that draw as much from her visits to New York City Ballet and her practice in Cunningham class (where we toil and sweat together from time to time) as from her observant personality and quietly expansive, unadorned physicality. These influences and qualities tend to attract dancers of similar sensibilities, and longtime collaborators Sienna Russo and Paulina Meneses are exemplary of her style in "Tarantella," a rigorous study on the duet. The work draws from material the pair danced in previous works, now danced in silence, such that their footfalls become the musical score. Their unison is extraordinarily precise yet easeful, though by no means easy, given the volume and complexity of steps and repetitions. Balletic quotations are delivered with presentational frankness that segue seamlessly through pedestrian interludes and passages of partnering that weave and spring in unexpected arrangements from a single handhold. Antinozzi distills her dance to its most basic elements—form and time—to sustain attention across dense fields of phrases and plains of stillness that lend themselves to close study in the spare confines of the Underground.



IV Castellanos; Photo: Courtesy of Artist

IV Castellanos “Leche Hervida en Vivo” (in rehearsal June 3)

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[IV Castellanos](#) grounds the Underground space in preparation for the introspective and participatory arc of their ritual performance, titled “Leche Hervida en Vivo,” which incorporates elements of their overlapping audiovisual, sculptural, and movement practices. Four painted clip lights branch from a slim power column to illuminate the space with long, soft directional shadows; snippets of songs, voices, and dialogue emerge from the contact between intricate audio circuit boards and a microphone looped around their neck. The presence of their partner (the artist Emily Johnson, who co-facilitates an ongoing practice of [“Kinstillatory Mappings in Light and Dark Matter”](#) at Abrons), their dog, and their curious toddler circulate tangible energies of care in the space as the architecture of the work takes shape. Castellanos described to me how they would invite audience members to participate in a ritual of remembrance and release that harnesses the power of words—sensations, memories, ancestries—written, spoken, and invoked through the body.



Ursula Eagly; Photo: Anja Hitzenberger

### Ursula Eagly, “Collective Imagination” (in rehearsal June 3)

[Ursula Eagly](#) continues her explorations of group dreaming in “Collective Imagination,” a series of meditative tableaux bathed in saturated washes of color. The four performers stand, crouch, or recline in arrangements of overlapping gestures, their tendrilled fingers connecting the chain of their bodies and radiating into the space around them. Their collective stillness comes alive in their gazes, which move from oblique to direct to internal as their bright yellow-shadowed lids flutter closed to enter their dream state. Eagly experiments with the tone and progression of the lighting palette—red, blue, green, orange—while ensuring the performers can note color changes through closed eyes. In a run through, their group narrations spill out from three successive tableaux: a fantastic story built through associations between image, word, and sensation; a stream-of-consciousness descriptive collage of their immediate environment; and tumbling abstractions that ring with a viscerally familiar strangeness. Their extended stillness, punctuated by brief cleanses of motion and minute shifts of posture and gaze, draws attention to the dynamic liveness of their minds and the vast interior worlds of their bodies.



CoCoMotion; Photo: Marisol Díaz-Gordon

### CoCoMotion in “Movement Mamas, Vol. 2” (in rehearsal June 4)

[CoCoMotion](#), led by choreographer and performer Christina “CocoMotion” Smith, offers “Movement Mamas, Vol. 2,” which opens with an excerpt from an original short film of the same name. The film sketches intimate portraits of dancing mothers who express their lived experiences through their personal movement signatures and voiceover testimonials. Smith, who is a mother of three, exudes an irrepressible spirit that channels dance as a means of building and sustaining community. The strength of her collaborations was amply evident in her preparations with dancers Katie Oliver and Darlene Kokayi, who joined Smith for a trio set to Jidenna’s eminently danceable “Sufi Woman.” They blend Afro-diasporic forms and street and club dance vernaculars with a fluency that bubbles over into sheer pleasure. Rhythms bounce between hips and shoulders, snaking through expressive arms and gliding feet in an all-too-brief sampling of their rich and varied dancing lives.



Antonio Ramos & The Gangbangers; Photo:Cherylynn Tsushima

**Antonio Ramos & the Gangbangers in collaboration with Saúl Ulerio, “Fuegos salvajes y turista !!” (in rehearsal June 4)**

Collaborators [Antonio Ramos](#) and [Saúl Ulerio](#) are perfectly complementary foils of clarity and chaos whose working relationship speaks volumes of their process in a scant 40-minute tech whirlwind for their “Fuegos salvajes y turista!!” Ramos, bearing a wagonload of props, wigs, and an inflatable kiddie pool, leans into his spatial and sensory acuities: sensing light, tuning volume, touching walls, careening through space. Meanwhile, Ulerio sets about with technicalities, working with Performance Mix’s lighting designer, Emma Rivera, to quickly grasp the space’s lighting specs and co-create a cue progression through precise directives of timing, tone, and shape. Ramos and Ulerio scheme in flutters of Spanglish, trying on wigs and running through flocking patterns and swirling unison duets as the hum of the kiddie pool inflation pump drones behind them. I glean only snatches of their plan, which includes a water gun loaded with lube (“SO MUCH LUBE,” Antinozzi recounts to me the next morning in class, eyes wide with glee), and I look forward to seeing their reprise of this work at [“Salon, Please” at Kestrels on June 13.](#)



chameckilerner; Photo: Rosane Chamecki

**chameckilerner, "Transmission" (film screened June 6)**

[chameckilerner](#), the interdisciplinary collaborative duo of Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner, present "Transmission," a playful short film that stitches together snippets from an extended public dance project. Working with dance material gleaned from their social media feeds (Balanchine, Fosse, Björk, and an array of social dances make an appearance), the artists invite passersby in a park to learn brief passages of choreography and transmit them to another person. The project lands somewhere between a more intimate version of Trisha Brown's semaphoric "Roof Piece" and a screen-free analogue of TikTok dance trends. As moving snapshots accumulate in stacks and layers on the screen, we see how the transmission process can radically change the interpretation of shapes and dynamics in the body, at times rendering the original choreography unrecognizable. Using only body-to-body communication without video or musical references, each individual produces an original all their own: exuberant, awkward, graceful, silly, or sincere. The film serves as an apt reminder that dance is a living art form, one that relies on the body as canvas, medium, and instrument.



Karen Bernard Projects ; Photo: Paula Court, courtesy of The Kitchen

#### Karen Bernard, “Rheumatica” (in rehearsal June 6)

I was particularly disappointed to miss Performance Mix’s “Saturday Night Special” program, which featured works by New Dance Alliance Executive and Artistic Director Karen Bernard and Montreal-based guest artists Elena Lev, Dorian Nuskind-Oder, and Simon Grenier-Poirier. It was a rare pleasure to witness Bernard prepare and rehearse her longform solo, “Rheumatica,” as an ode to her twinned durational practices of living and dancing. The work’s title draws from a recent bout of rheumatism that severely curtailed her physical capacity, and her self-proclaimed “miraculous” recovery is evident in the fluid symmetries and focused stamina of her septuagenarian dancing body. Her feet carry undercurrents of rhythm as she traces small scuffed steps around a blue-taped perimeter and across a yellow center line, her arms and hands expressive in gestures by turn spiky, tender, undulating, and free. Hips and shoulders give a subtle twist to her linear boogie, which opens up into diminishing figure eight patterns that coalesce into a brief spotlight ode. Her torso ascends and descends through elegantly rounded gestures of holding, shielding, offering, rising; she bows to shake and nod her silvered head to the beat that lives in her body. The lights dim almost imperceptibly slowly (a two-minute fade to black) on her rapturous freestyling—a slow fade on what I can only hope will be a long life and legacy of bringing decades of experimental performance to light.

**Stay tuned for a roundup of the rest of the Performance Mix Festival!**