

Being & Feeling (Alone, Together)

Lamont Gallery, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, NH USA

Spring/Summer 2020

Moving Together: Interviews with Choreographers (Compiled)

Interview with Shannon Humphreys & Chris Engles: Fledge

Posted on June 25, 2020 by Lamont Gallery

Choreographer/dancer: Shannon Humphreys & community (below)

Videography/editing: Chris Engles

Music: Jason Jordan

In an effort to collaborate with artists in other disciplines, we reached out to local dancers and choreographers and asked them to create a piece in response to the themes of the exhibition and to the general state of things in the world. You can view the complete collection of dance videos on our Vimeo page.

Fledge was created by Shannon Humphreys and Chris Engles in collaboration with a community of people who submitted movement or movement instructions electronically. Shannon collected, learned, structured and performed the material they sent, and it forms the basis of the choreography in the film.

Inspired by Kwame Alexander's "If Trees Can Keep Dancing So Can I": A Community Poem To Cope In Crisis, and a call for short dance/choreography/movement pieces for Moving Together, filmmaker Chris Engles and dancer/choreographer Shannon Humphreys collaborated with their social media community to create this short dance/movement film.

Q: *It's exciting to know Fledge was built collaboratively, with a community of dancers and creatives each sharing inspired pieces of movement and ideas. What were the steps involved in weaving together these disparate inspirations in order to arrive at this cohesive beautiful piece of work filled with story?*

A: (Shannon Humphreys): Because we got the call for art about ten days before the submission date, we were working against a pretty tight deadline. As a choreographer, generating material is time consuming and if you force it, that often shows. However, I have had a long career as an interpreter of the movement, story and ideas of others so I decided to use that skill here. In addition, we were in the middle of the pandemic, with all my friends and fellow artists trying to work through the challenges of physical isolation. Within 24 hours I had come up with this concept of casting a wide net out to the creative community online to generate the material.

My instructions were intentionally very broad in every area except quantity—I requested each person send me five actions—so that it would be a light load for all the participants. I needed to keep the bar low because the turnaround was quick—I needed to have the materials asap so

we could begin building the structure. Once I started receiving the material (and it was very disparate) my first step was to learn and interpret all the actions. The material fell into a few buckets: written instructions for actions that I was meant to interpret and perform, individual disconnected movements or gestures, and fully choreographed short phrases. I started by learning all the pieces, and once I became familiar with the materials I could mix them together, arrange and rearrange the order, change the level or speed or dynamics—all the while ruminating on how to include and interpret some of the more obscure and poetic instructions I had received. The time constraint meant that we needed to begin filming while I was still in this stage of playing. We went to a few locations over two days and Chris filmed me as I tried out different ways to perform the movements. Once Chris pulled all the footage out of his camera, we began to see some themes emerge. We made a decision to use Jason Jordan's music (a piece Chris commissioned for *Finding Heaven Under Our Feet: Making Modern Dance*, but never used) and that cemented the somber mood and helped drive the story. Chris made the decision to strip out all the color, both to add weight to the melancholy, and also to smooth out the discontinuity in the light and color in the footage from different locations on different days.

***Q:** In deciding on a name for this film, how did you arrive at *Fledge*? What do you hope to impart on the audience as they experience this work?*

A: (SH): We actually began with a working title of *Alone Together*, but to be honest I felt from the beginning that it was a little bit flat. The very first community submission I got included the instruction “feeding birds out of your hand and watching them fly,” and I think that is when I began seeing and incorporating bird imagery into the work. The threads of isolation and freedom, enclosed and expansive space weave through the story along with the birds, so the idea of leaving the nest was a logical progression of the ideas that were coming together. When we were discussing the name, Chris asked me why not “Fledgling,” and I said fledgling is a noun—a thing that I would be seen to be representing. If we call it that, the film would be about me. “Fledge” is a verb—an action—it’s moving.

***Q:** A filming location seems to be a critical component in a story’s narrative, imbuing nuances that expand one’s experience and understanding. Where was *Fledge* filmed? Why were these locations chosen?*

A: (SH): Constraints are a theme in the making of *Fledge*, and that includes the locations available to us for filming. Chris and I have been sheltering in his house in Woods Hole, MA since both our employers transitioned us to remote work in March, and the stay at home order was still in effect when we filmed this in May. We wanted to film in a natural setting, but we needed to choose locations that were nearby, and still accessible to the public. Chris grew up in Falmouth, so he is very familiar with the area—he chose Beebe Woods, which is on conservation land around Highfield Hall and Gardens, because we wanted trees (bird theme), and he knew it would be open to the public for mental health walks. I was immediately drawn to the tree with the hole through it, and asked Chris if he could use the hole as a frame to confine the view of me. It was tough for him to manage the light and focus, but he just adapted as I piled more constraints onto the project.

We were driving out of the Highfield grounds when I noticed Patrick Dougherty's stickwork sculpture, *A Passing Fancy*. It looks like a giant nest—and although we had not yet named the work, I think the ideas around sheltering in our home during the pandemic and the bird theme came together in that moment. Chris filmed me as I explored and responded to the winding spaces created by the sculpture. Finally, after having thoroughly captured confined space, we felt we needed the contrast of an empty beach with the expanse of the ocean as a backdrop. Woods Hole residents' private beach, Nobska, fit the bill. The gulls were a bonus.

Q: For Chris, why the shift from public broadcasting to an arts focus in film and photography? Can you share with us what you're currently working on?

A: (Chris Engles): Actually, it was really a shift from art to radio, then back to art. Traditionally there's been a ton of national & local public radio content produced in Boston, which was fortunate for me, because just as I was getting out of Berklee College of Music, where I studied music production, recording studios around town were starting to fold—everyone was convinced they could make records at home with the arrival of digital audio. So public radio was a great opportunity to use sound in creative/interesting/fun ways and get the bills paid. But I was always dabbling in some sort of creative musical endeavor on the side. As time and technology marched on, those explorations naturally bled into the video realm. When technology made it possible to cut video on a desktop computer—we're talking 1994-95—I started booking time at BVFV (Boston Film and Video Foundation) around the corner from Berklee to go in and mess around with VHS and Hi-8 footage. So it was really more of a tectonic shift back to art, that was in motion from 1995 to 2006.

As for current work, I was in the process of exploring a film project in Italy when the pandemic hit, so that's obviously off the table for the foreseeable future. While we're working remotely from Cape Cod, another idea I'm thinking about is a short film about the Wampanoag tribe in Mashpee, and their efforts to reclaim their language after 150 years of dormancy.

Q: For Shannon, you shared in your bio that you also work with the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard – a biomedical research community. What are the intersections you've witnessed within the fields of science and art? How does one discipline inform the other? How do you think we can amplify the necessity of artistic disciplines and experiences across our communities?

A: (SH): To be clear, although I have worked in administration supporting scientists for the last sixteen years, I do not have a background in science. My career in nonprofit administration led me from arts organizations to mission-driven scientific institutions, first Harvard Medical School, and then the Broad Institute. When we talk about the intersection of science and art in the context of the Broad Institute's artist residency program, we talk about art and science as different ways that humans tackle unanswered questions, and try to understand our place in the universe. This feels right to me. The curious mindset that continues to explore the world,

ask questions, look for connections, solve problems, keep learning, keep making—that is the mindset an artistic practice develops, in my opinion. It is certainly the mindset I aspire to.

Artist Bios:

Shannon Humphreys grew up dancing in Orlando, FL, received a BA (Hons) in Dance from the University of Surrey in Guildford, England and has performed on the east coast with theater groups, opera companies, and with regional ballet and modern dance companies including Orlando Ballet (then Southern Ballet Theatre), Demetrius Klein & Dancers and Voci Dance. She performed in the work of Jody Weber from 1999 to 2019, and was a founding member of Weber Dance. She has also performed as a guest artist with Peter DiMuro's Public Displays of Motion, and at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston in work by Trisha Brown, Heidi Latsky and Faye Driscoll. In addition to venues in the Boston area, Shannon's choreography has been performed in England, Germany and Orlando (including The Land of Fog and Whistles at the Orlando International Fringe Festival). She serves on the Boards of Directors of Weber Dance, as well as the Brickbottom Artists Association, and coordinates the artist-in-residence program at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard.

Chris Engles spent over a decade in public broadcasting as a technical director for such programs as NPR's Carthack, PRI's The World and NPR's Living on Earth. In the mid 1990's he transitioned to narrative and documentary film work. His first feature length effort, This Town, premiered at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 2002 and was an official selection of the New York International Independent Film Festival. Since then Chris has gone on to make several short form video profiles of such noted artists as painters John Murray and Sean Flood, as well as his talented neighbors at the Brickbottom Artist Building in Somerville MA. In 2017 he premiered his feature length documentary film Finding Heaven Under Our Feet: Making Modern Dance at the Somerville Theater.

Community Collaborators for Fledge:

Brian Crabtree, Caitlin Klinger, Chris Mesarch, Ellen Young, Jody Weber, Kristy Kuhn, Donnelly with Kevin, Keelyn, Lydia and Pumpkin Donnelly, Maggie Husak, Zimora Aswat, Becca Rozell with Brady, Aya and Mikko Murray.

Interview Conducted by Aimee Towey-Landry

Aimee Towey-Landry joined the Lamont Gallery in the winter of 2018 as the interim Gallery Manager and in 2019 she became a gallery attendant. She has over six years of experience in arts administration from her positions as Registrar and Exhibitions Coordinator at the Gulf Coast Museum of Art in Largo, Florida and Special Projects Coordinator at the Tampa Museum of Art in Tampa, Florida. She is currently working with a team of professionals to build a non-profit that serves the homeless and the housing vulnerable populations of greater Concord. She also volunteers at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

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Moving Together: Interviews with Choreographers

Interview with Christina Xiao: *Journey to the Heart*

Posted on June 25, 2020 by Lamont Gallery

Choreographer/dancer: Christina Xiao

Composer: Christina Xiao

This improvised piece is to Christina Xiao's composition, "Journey of the Heart," where longing for connection to others, trust, and rebuilding relationships are key themes. Christina is a current student at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Q: These movements are so wonderfully intricate and intimate. There's a sense of awakening, discovery, frustration and understanding that seems to unfold as the piece progresses. Can you share with our readers the inspiration for this musical score and these movements?

A: Thank you! I would say that description hits the nail on the head in terms of the emotions I wanted to convey. In addition to that, I was inspired by the desire and longing for connection to others, themes of trust, and the experience of rebuilding relationships, based on personal experience.

Q: As you wrote the music for this piece was the choreography already developed, or did one inspire the other?

A: I wanted to express connection and the different struggles that come with reaching out. It just so happened that I'd composed a piece before called Journey to the Heart, and I felt inspired by it!

Q: The word "process" is used frequently in the arts – across all disciplines. What does your creative process look and feel like? As a composer/musician and dancer, how do you discern which artistic pursuit to move towards and when to incorporate one with the other-or not?

A: I flesh out the idea and the themes I want to portray in my head first, making a vague plan. This dance piece was all improv, so I did not want to plan too much in advance. This was also an extra challenge for myself, because improv is something that I find hard! Still, this added to the themes I wanted to express, of reaching out even with many risks, and being almost unsure of the outcome. Honestly, many times when listening to my pieces, people have noted that it sounds like a dance, or that they could see someone performing to my music. I don't consciously try to incorporate this, but I suppose it naturally becomes part of my composition!

However, I really think that combining both makes the creative experience for myself much more rewarding.

***Q:** There's a dynamic cast shadow that moves swiftly alongside and behind you throughout the dance; is it an intentional element? If yes, can you describe the role this shadow is meant to play?*

A: I'd like to leave some room for interpretation, but I would say that the light and shadow elements are connected to the themes of self-doubt, fear, hope, and new beginnings.

***Q:** What do you hope your audience will experience as they listen to and watch Journey to the Heart?*

A: I hope people enjoy the overall performance, whether they do through examining the lighting, seeing how I move, or experiencing their own emotions related to human connection. I would also encourage people to reflect on themselves and their relationships with people who they cannot see in person right now. All these natural feelings of trust, fear, hope, and love come into play when we connect with others, and I hope that people are reminded of these interpersonal moments when it feels like we are physically so far apart.

***Q:** Given these present Covid-19 circumstances, what role do you envision the arts stepping into as we move into the days and weeks ahead?*

A: Arts have always been an underrated form of connection. Whether it is through art pieces, dance performances, creative videos, or poetry, I think everyone can remember a certain time they were touched just through these mediums. As Covid-19 continues on, as we remain inside with less in-person connection, I feel like we are truly lacking this kind of special emotional experience with each other that comes with meeting in person. Technology hasn't quite progressed far enough to naturally replicate it yet! So art may be the best way to share the common emotional experience we're missing right now.

Interview Conducted by Aimee Towey-Landry

Aimee Towey-Landry joined the Lamont Gallery in the winter of 2018 as the interim Gallery Manager and in 2019 she became a gallery attendant. She has over six years of experience in arts administration from her positions as Registrar and Exhibitions Coordinator at the Gulf Coast Museum of Art in Largo, Florida and Special Projects Coordinator at the Tampa Museum of Art in Tampa, Florida. She is currently working with a team of professionals to build a non-profit that serves the homeless and the housing vulnerable populations of greater Concord. She also volunteers at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

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Moving Together: Interviews with Choreographers

Interview with Kara Fili: *Moved by Invisibles*

Posted on June 25, 2020 by Lamont Gallery

Choreographer/dancer: Kara Fili

***Q:** What a beautiful piece of movement and writing. Did you choreograph and write simultaneously, or did the words come first and then the movement, or vice versa?*

A: The process had a cyclical nature. Since quarantine began, I have found comfort and meaning in journaling. When asked to submit a movement video, I was really struck by how much the title of this exhibition related to our present moment and felt compelled to create from there. The prompts of performing a duet alone and dancing stillness were also interesting to me. I revisited my journal and was at first going to submit a video of movement in nature (so not me dancing at all) overlaid with my voice saying excerpts from my journal that were standing out to me such as “so many opposites,” wanting to “yield to the current and let myself be carried by the present moment,” and feeling like there was “a hovering cloud, misty and nebulous, never quite sure what form it is in” that was occupying my headspace constantly.

Then we had an insanely windy day. I wanted to play with the wind, thinking of it as my partner. The improvised movement that came out was informed by the circumstances of the moment and my journal entries, and all of this then informed the writing, which I wrote without looking at the video. I love the “happy accidents” that come out of chance layering!

***Q:** The wind and the trees seemed to catch and call to you – as if your movement needed theirs in order to be complete and whole – are you exploring the idea of surrender and its many manifestations?*

A: That is a beautiful interpretation. As I was dancing, I was trying to be really aware of outside and inside forces. I was thinking a lot about allowing myself to “yield to the current” of external forces that I have no control over while still maintaining my own ground, my own strength, which is pretty contradictory, but this ebb and flow of energy, emotion, strength, etc. is the reality we navigate every day, I think. There is something liberating about acceptance of circumstance and something about that that is also very unnerving to me.

***Q:** During these Covid-19 days it can be a challenge not to filter and process information through this isolating lens. We each carry deep, personal experiences as we navigate the*

unknown and journey through these days. Is Moved By Invisibles a personal reflection or a collective observation of community at this time in our world.

A: This was a personal reflection based on my own experiences, however I think there are some universalities that could speak to any person who has allowed themselves to go to an introspective place these past few months.

Q: *There is a series of questions you pose in your bio on your website; how do we learn, what makes us feel and think, how can we be better to ourselves, each other and our planet. Are these re-occurring themes you regularly explore in your work? Do you address these in Moved by Invisibles?*

A: These are questions that are ever-present in my life, whether I'm in the midst of making, teaching or just plain living. I wouldn't call them themes in my work, but they do guide me through all kinds of processes.

Q: *I noticed on your website you highlighted an upcoming piece of work, It Goes Like This Stories of Movement (postponed due to Covid-19), can you share with us some of the highlights of this project?*

A: IGLT in its original form was a live, multi-modal storytelling event. Featuring artist/storytellers Bethany Van Delf, J. Michael Winward, Joan Green, Tashwn Taylor, Corey Laitman and Ashley Rose Salomon, these artist/storytellers of various mediums and life experiences were to share a personal story surrounding the theme of "movement." Comedy, performance painting, music, dance, video, poetry... I was really excited to present this unique show, and then Covid 19 hit and it had to be indefinitely postponed. Depending on the state of the world, I hope to produce it as a virtual event or live event with live streaming within the next 6 months.

Q: *What critical role do you believe the arts will adopt in the coming days?*

A: I think a lot of people are starving for connection with others and for making sense of and changing the social and public health crises we're facing. The arts have the unique capability to reach people. And I mean really reach them at a point of true comprehension, expression and transformation. The arts take us out of our "everyday" and help us to see the world anew, which is why they must be a central component of our recovery process. They arts stimulate hope, growth, understanding, critical thinking and community building, and we need these things more than ever.

Artist Bio:

Connecting with people ages 3 – 100+ through movement and the arts has been the basis of Kara's work since 2004. Believing that the arts are empowering agents of change, discovery and wellness, she enjoys teaching and performing in such public and private spaces as schools, senior living places, parks, streets,

community centers and theaters. Her independent choreography is often marked by emotionality, humor and storytelling, and it is informed by her study of West African and African diasporic dance, modern dance and improvisation. She is also a member of Benkadi Drum & Dance and Peter DiMuro/Public Displays of Motion. www.karafili.com

Interview Conducted by Aimee Towey-Landry

Aimee Towey-Landry joined the Lamont Gallery in the winter of 2018 as the interim Gallery Manager and in 2019 she became a gallery attendant. She has over six years of experience in arts administration from her positions as Registrar and Exhibitions Coordinator at the Gulf Coast Museum of Art in Largo, Florida and Special Projects Coordinator at the Tampa Museum of Art in Tampa, Florida. She is currently working with a team of professionals to build a non-profit that serves the homeless and the housing vulnerable populations of greater Concord. She also volunteers at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

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Moving Together: Interviews with Choreographers

Interview with Ann Elliott: To

Posted on July 1, 2020 by Lamont Gallery

Q: *How did your young students react to the story of My Neighbor Totoro when you first read it to them? Were your students already familiar with it, or Anime?*

A: Grow peas please! I was beginning to plant my garden during quarantine when the information from Lamont Gallery came out about creating a movement piece about *Being & Feeling (Alone, Together)*. My first thought was [let's make] a piece funny, absurd and childlike. Thinking of the children I work with makes me smile in these Covid-19 times. In the Fall of 2019, I read a picture book to the children in my care of My Neighbor Totoro, by Hayao Miyazaki. This was my inspiration.

Q: *Does the action of planting, hoeing, and the ebullient Grow! arm-wave come from anime or from you? Do your young students act out the story physically while you read it out loud to them?*

A: The action of planting, hoeing, and the ebullient Grow! arm-wave in Totoro come from the book and anime. My young charges act out the story physically on the playground. Totoro gives the children, in the pictures, acorns to grow and later in the story whistles into the acorns. I had wonderful fun teaching the children I work with how to whistle into acorn caps outside earlier this school year.

***Q:** How did you come to love the story of Totoro and Anime in general? What about Hayao Miyazaki and his stories connected to Being & Feeling (Alone, Together) for you?*

A: My brother first introduced me to Totoro when he got a VHS tape at a yard sale in Allston, MA probably in 1987 or 1988. The recording was in Japanese and had Grave of the Fireflies on the copy too. Wow! Grave of the Fireflies makes me think about the theme here also Being & Feeling (Alone, Together). I instantly came to love the story of Totoro and Anime in general. Now that I think about it, Hayao Miyazaki and his stories connect to Being & Feeling (Alone, Together) quite a lot. If you have the chance, please watch some other titles like Spirited Away or Whisper of the Heart.

***Q:** Did you already have a Totoro costume?*

A: I already had my Totoro costume. I made it for The Slambovian Circus of Dreams costume ball in 2018. My husband made a “No Face” costume.

***Q:** Do you hope your dance helps people remember the many things they still can engage in during Covid 19?*

A: I hope my Totoro Dance Video reminds us all that we can still enjoy things like gardening and dancing outside – as well as reading and watching anime inside.

***Q:** Do you have previous dance training, movement or acting, other?*

A: For quite a few years now I have sang and occasionally danced with the community chorus called Vocalocity in Stratham, NH. My previous dance training is from Carole Seretto’s Dance Studio in Fitchburg, MA from 1970-1985. I danced with The Springfield College Exhibition Dancers at Springfield College in Springfield MA 1985-1989. I took classes in dance and choreography at Chelsea School of Human Movement in Eastbourne England in 1987. I sang and danced as part of Up With People’s Cast F 1991 and my claim to fame the year I traveled the world was as a dancing trash bag to the song called Non-Disposable Rap!!). I wish I had a picture of that to share with you.

Ann Elliott is a teacher at the Harris Family Children’s Center at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Interviewed Conducted by Jennifer Benn:

Jennifer Benn has been a Lamont Gallery attendant since 2015. She is also a professional painter with a studio at the Button Factory in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. She earned her MFA in painting from Syracuse University and has led programs for students to study art and culture in Ireland at the Burren College of Art. Jennifer teaches abstract painting at Maine College of art and offers private lessons at her studio.

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Moving Together: Interviews with Choreographers

Interview with Khinezin Win: *Untitled*

Posted on July 1, 2020 by Lamont Gallery

Choreographer/dancer: Khinezin Win

***Q:** Are there themes you find yourself repeating in dance or choreography? How do you approach these themes?*

A: There aren't any specific themes that I gravitate towards. Most of my choreography stems from my interpretation of the music and my mindset at a given time. However, I've noticed a pattern of a lot of self-exploration in my choreography. I tend to dig deep into themes about mental health connections with other humans and current events.

Q: What does dance mean to you?

A: Dance is how I understand myself and the world around me.

"we are actors that don't speak" "we speak with our energy, our facials, and our emotions that are being expressed through our movement, through our ligaments" "the song and you have to become one mirage" ...

***Q:** How do you approach choreography, initially?*

A: Dance choreography picks up on the emotion of the song and I purposely pick movements that bring the song to life. The details are EVERYTHING. It's not just dancing to a bunch of beats with random movements. There's a beauty that comes with a combination of paying attention of technique and accentuating every detail in a combo. A dance becomes so much more once you actually dance to it.

***Q:** How do you select music?*

A: I think its fate that brings me to music. I don't usually look for music; I let the music find me. Sometimes when I'm at a store or at a restaurant, I find myself creating choreo in my head to the background music. I try to look for the song online and then improv to it and try to create choreographs from there.

Khinezin Win is a recent graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy.

Interview conducted by Anne Chen PEA '22. Anne is a current student at Phillips Exeter Academy and a Lamont Gallery student proctor.