

## A Note from Julie Potter, Director, ODC Theater

Thank you for joining us for the final production in the 2018 ODC Theater season. Here in this performance space we consider the promises, risks, and urgencies of assembly at this moment, and how gathering at the theater shapes economies of time, attention, and experience, with the possibility of becoming more meaningfully connected.

Tonight's premiere was created by former ODC Resident Artist Catherine Galasso. As ODC Theater serves as a crossroads for local and visiting dance artists, this project features a Bay Area cast working in collaboration with Galasso, now based in New York. Galasso's playful world marries her contemporary approach to performance rooted in the avant-garde, with elements of physical humor, marvel, and a cinematic gaze that are her trademark.

While situated in San Francisco between 2006 to 2010, Galasso participated in the CHIME mentorship program working with choreographer Ralph Lemon. Her last work to premiere at ODC Theater was *Bring On The Lumière!*, an imagining of French cinema pioneers the Lumière Brothers. Since then, she has considered various real and fictional characters to inspire the worlds in which her dances unfold. For a Danspace Project commission, she focused on Andy de Groat, an American choreographer based in France. And for tonight's *Alone Together*, Galasso has developed an abstracted exploration of the tales spun by Boccaccio's 14th century novel, *The Decameron*.

*Alone Together* is Galasso's third installment of her multi-chapter performance series, *Of Iron and Diamonds*. The first chapter premiered at BAX/Brooklyn Arts Exchange last year. It featured a sextet of performers including Galasso's then eight-month-old son. This past summer, Galasso unveiled the second chapter, *Of Granite and Glass*, as part of the River to River Festival in New York.

This month at ODC Theater we've launched our 2019 season, composed of projects which propose imaginative worlds and strategies for our times: rituals for navigating uncertainty, perspectives on labor and dignity, embodied song for healing and undoing habits, and dance as a way of knowing.

Please join us to cultivate ODC Theater as a shared enterprise of creative discovery, awareness and respectful negotiation. Help us make the physical and tangible exchanges at this site potent with celebration, thought, curiosity, improvisation, deliberation, care, and, of course, dance.

Warmly,



Julie Potter

# Alone Together

*Alone Together* is Galasso's third installment of her multi-chapter performance series, *Of Iron and Diamonds*, based on Boccaccio's 14th century collection of novellas, *The Decameron*. Each chapter is uniquely site- and cast-specific. The first chapter was developed and performed at Brooklyn Arts Exchange in June 2017 featuring 6 performers including 65-year old former downtown dance legend Frank Conversano and Catherine's then 8-month old son Atlas Green. The second chapter, *Of Granite and Glass*, was created for the grand marble staircase at the Brookfield Place Winter Garden in Lower Manhattan, co-commissioned by Arts Brookfield and LMCC for The River To River Festival.

## A Note from Dave Cerf

Superficial appearance may be deceiving. **It may look a bit like Catherine and I work together as choreographer and music composer, but our shared language is actually cinema—framing, rhythm through editing, fluidity of time.** It's not uncommon for either of us to "rewind" the gestures of an improvisation or the sonic layers of an unfolding musical piece, isolate what touched us, snip that out, and metaphorically hang it on the cutting room wall for later use.

Catherine and I also share an appreciation for blurring the line between what is real—some dancers in a space—and the structural arc we impose on them via the choreography. Thanks to the residency at ODC, we've had the luxury to develop *Alone Together* in the space where it will be performed. **Sound design for dance (and cinema) often assumes the venue is a neutral space to be sonically colored however the designer desires, but our sounds will often carry the imprint of the theater at ODC, and in that sense be a bit more "real" than a sound recorded elsewhere.** What you will experience in the final performance is not dance choreographed by Catherine and music composed by Dave, but choreography developed by reacting to Dave's musical compositions, which then gets reworked in reaction to the choreography.

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# Catherine Galasso in Conversation with ODC Writer in Residence, Marie Tollon

*Choreographer Catherine Galasso's background in film and painting is made evident through her careful manipulation of space, sound and light: she inserts choreography within cinematic frames, creating movement sequences with the uncanny quality of film shots. In the last work she presented at ODC in November 2011, Bring On The Lumière!, a performer shadowed another with a rudimentary clamp-light, shining the beam on specific body parts, providing the viewer with what appeared to be the live-performance equivalent of a film's close up. Similar cinematic qualities imbue Of Iron and Diamonds V3: Alone Together. In the piece, Galasso, in collaboration with sound designer Dave Cerf, revisits the theater space, shifting the relationship between viewers and performers and questioning the act of watching.*

*Alone Together is the third installment in a series of site-specific and cast-specific works based on 14th-century Italian author Boccaccio's The Decameron. Galasso, a former ODC Theater resident artist now based in New York, worked in close collaboration with an all Bay Area cast (Arletta Anderson, Eric Garcia, Cookie Harrist, Hien Huynh, Phoenicia Pettyjohn, Karla Quintero, Galicia Stack Lozano) over a five-day technical residency last March and again for the past two and a half weeks. Below is an edited conversation with the artist.*

**Marie Tollon: You hold degrees in painting and film. How did you come to dance?**

Catherine Galasso: My dad was a composer, my mom a dancer and they met working with Robert Wilson, so I grew up seeing a lot of avant-garde theater. I got into musical theater as a kid and I loved to perform. My mom came into the performing arts at a time when dancing was being revolutionized. She was more interested in improvisation – they called it “free dancing” - so I didn't have any classical training in dance. I moved to Italy with my dad at age 11 and I became very interested in painting and drawing. As a kid I was adamant that I did not want to become an artist so I went to Cornell University to study anthropology. My passion had always been going to the movies - there was not a lot to do in Venice and I was pretty isolated so I would just go by myself to the movies a lot. In college I switched my degree to film but also decided to take a choreography class on a whim. Cornell didn't have a huge dance department but one of the professors, Jim Self, had worked with Robert Wilson, so there was a little bit of aesthetic lineage and I felt understood. It really allowed me to experiment, play, and realize that directing was actually a lot of fun and very natural for me.

**MT: What specifically interested you in choosing Boccaccio's Decameron as a through line for the dances you've been making?**

CG: I was most attracted by the frame story, which is that 10 young people escape the Plague, which was happening at the time. They isolate themselves in a villa and pass the time by telling stories. There's so much humor in the darkness. Boccaccio had a way of writing stories in the voice of the character - each story is very specific to the teller – and in some ways the stories are not deep at all but they do have that potential because they are actually criticizing who was in power at the time.

I also liked this very matter-of-fact response to what was a very dark, scary time where people were dying and they had no way of controlling it. I can relate to the idea of telling stories as a response to crisis, at a time when my peers and I are asking: What is the point of making art or abstract dance at a time when basic human rights are under attack, and the extent of our planetary damage feels more present than ever? Dance is the earliest

form of storytelling. We're not telling a fairy tale and we're not doing a rendition of any of the *Decameron* tales. But together, the concept, the frame story and the performers communicate a series of moods and images that hopefully take us out of this dark time we are living in.

**MT: Are there specific prompts, images, or references you asked the performers to work with?**

CG: No, we work with what's in the room. We start rehearsal with an improvisation. In longer processes, that generates a shared vocabulary so it's not just me dictating movement but we're coming up with a language together, not in any codified way but through osmosis.

We're really treating the theater as a set and as a home that we inhabit. We have a feeling in the work that this is a group of people that haven't left the theater in a very long time. And the viewer is coming into their home.

**MT: Is the audience interrupting or disturbing something then?**

CG: No, we've been waiting and are ready for you. The fourth wall is not a thing for me. I want to make sure to acknowledge the audience in the work because we're not performing in a vacuum. We're making this work with you. It doesn't mean that it's participatory but live theater is very much a dialogue with the people watching.

**MT: You mentioned the theater as a set. Can you talk more about that?**

CG: The audience is on the stage and the performers are on the seats. What's unique about ODC's B. Way Theater is that the rake is so steep that it offers an incredible backdrop. We're not just using it as a surface but as a set, therefore the piece is literally and figuratively taking place in the theater. The performers in *Alone Together* are both audience and performers at the same time. It becomes about the watching and about the relationship of the spectator to the performer. And that's specific to this place.

The idea behind the series based on the *Decameron*, *Of Iron and Diamonds*, is that each one is site-specific, cast-specific and that there is some generational range within the casting. In the first one, the cast included my 8 month-old son and also a 65 year-old former dancer and family friend. In the second work, a group of college students, which I had taught earlier that year, played teenagers crashing the show and doing a dance. *Alone Together* includes 12 year-old Galicia Stack Lozano.

**MT: How do you navigate the generational range?**

CG: Children on stage draw focus, so that's a really interesting challenge. I find it interesting how a child has so much narrative weight and people really start to read or project a story when a child is present. I had this experience working with my son that when there's a baby on stage, that is the only thing that people will watch. They might not see anything else. And that's OK if I am not trying to compete with that. Galicia is very integrated into the piece, and also a bit of an outsider - like a voyeur, or standing in for the audience.

**MT: There are strong cinematic and compositional elements in your work. Did you draw from specific film or visual arts references for this work or more generally from your film background?**

CG: I have my long-term influences and inspirations –David Lynch and Ingmar Bergman are central for me. Dave Cerf, who is doing the music, is much more than just the composer

of the work. We have a lot of dialogue about the content and where the piece should go. I studied film and editing and Dave is also an editor and does a lot of sound for films so it feels like that's where our shared dialogue happens -where the cut should be, how to develop the piece energetically into a climax and where that energy ebbs and flows. Even though I don't work with film projection in my work, I see everything as if it's part of a film.

**MT: You had a 3-year residency at ODC and presented *Bring On The Lumière!* in the theater in 2011. How does it feel to be back in this theater after this 7-year hiatus?**

CG: The theater feels like an old friend. I have a lot of love for the theater because of the way that it allowed me to really realize some production dreams. When you are starting out, you just have a dance studio and some friends. Having grown up seeing these works of Robert Wilson that are so magical –there are people flying through the air, things disappearing and you don't know how- I felt that stuff was so inaccessible and unattainable in the dance world. Who has that kind of support or resources? It was through this three-year residency program, funded by the Mellon Foundation, that ODC started offering tech residencies. With *Lumière*, we had a week-long tech residency in the theater with the crew and it was like all of these dreams were being realized. It felt like a huge step for me personally as an artist. And it was also a year exactly after my father passed away. The *Lumière* soundtrack was composed by my father so the piece really became about loss. So I feel like it's an emotional place for me.

We had a tech residency for this new show as well, and this time we used it to create a deeper, more nuanced relationship with the space itself. Seven years later, if anything, I'm aware that I am more concerned with the wellbeing of my collaborators. Making sure that everyone in the process is taken care of and feels appreciated has become more of a priority. Because I think that the piece shouldn't be just for the audience, the piece should be for the people making it. We are coming together and building a micro community.

Another realization has been finding a way to make the whole experience less stressful. Because of this whole deadline thing, things can become so crazy and you start to not take care of yourself. Now that I have a child, I can't afford to do that anymore. There's an acceptance: this is as much as we can do, we're going to make the best out of it. And I don't think that the work is sacrificed. Especially in an abbreviated process you have to just go to the essence, and sometimes your first impulses are the best ones. You don't have time to question it.

**MT: You mentioned questioning the role of art in this time of crisis. What has this making process reinforced for you in terms of art's potential contribution, if anything?**

CG: When I see young people and the way that they spend time with one another in a virtual space it makes me very concerned about a lack of appreciation for sharing a physical space and relating to one another directly. **Whatever I can do to make that sort of gathering and being together more appealing, that's where I feel I can contribute. It's very important to me that even people who don't really love dance or don't feel like they understand it come in and are engaged and excited. I want to work in a form that transcends genres and becomes more a complete experience.** Live performance is a very valuable tool of empathy and community.

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