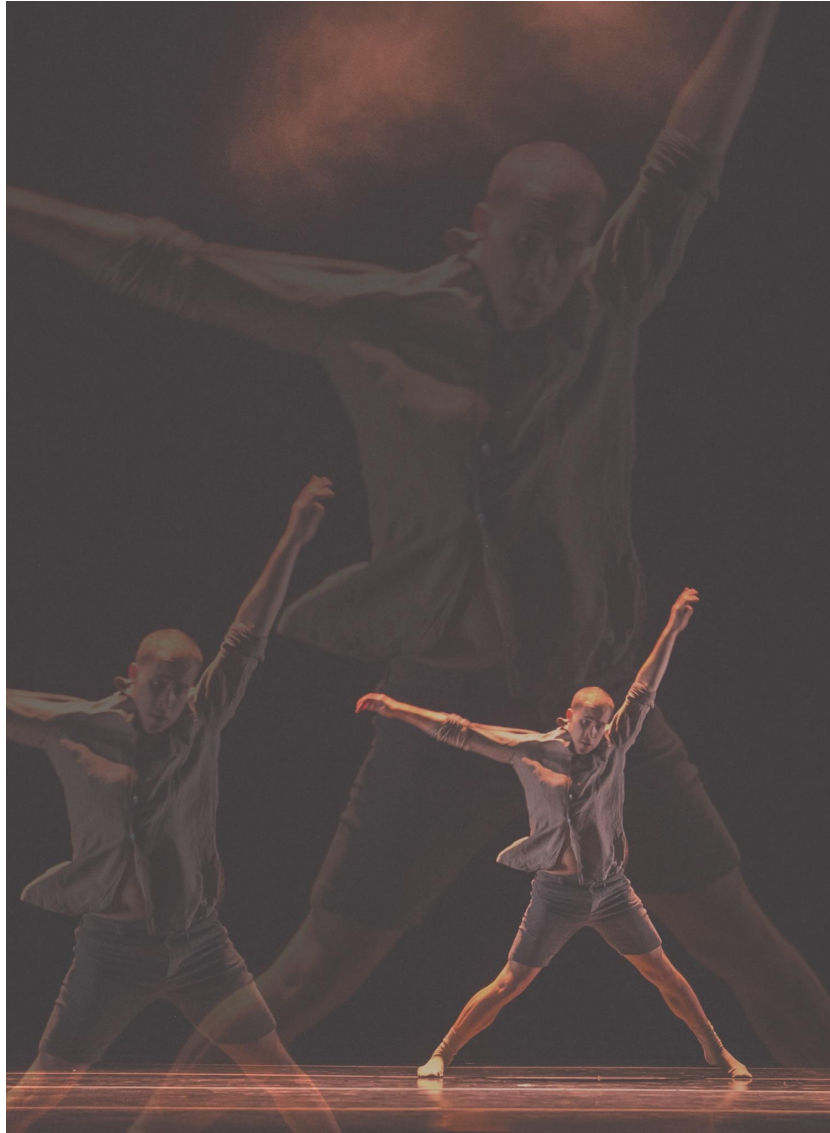


TU Dance presents

Sensible Existence

a project with choreography by Marcus Jarrell Willis



The O'Shaughnessy
Saint Paul, MN
May 13 & 14, 2022

TU DANCE

Founder & Artistic Director: Toni Pierce-Sands

Executive Director: Abdo Sayegh-Rodríguez

Artistic Associate: Laurel Keen

Production Manager: Joseph Bingham

Stage Manager/Lighting Supervisor: Garvin Jellison

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As we are all moving out of what has been a challenging time, I would like to thank you for all of the support, love and care that TU Dance has received from the Minnesota community and my colleagues from all over the globe.

Dance has the capacity to open us up to our shared humanity, whether it be through abstract or literal narratives. In this performance of "Sensible Existence", I invite us all to allow ourselves to experience the expression, physical strength, emotion, and spirit of what connects us, not what sets us apart.

Welcome to the forward-motion of TU Dance, I hope that you continue to find your love for dance!

Toni Pierce-Sands

ABOUT TU DANCE

TU Dance is known for its diverse artistic performances tackling important questions around gender, race, social justice, history, human resilience and more. Founded in 2004, TU Dance has received dozens of accolades and awards while touring nationwide. Under the artistic direction of Toni Pierce-Sands, TU Dance continues to be a leading dance company in the Twin Cities. Through celebrated performances of the professional company and accessible dance education at TU Dance Center, TU Dance provides opportunities for everyone to experience the connective power of dance.

The School at TU Dance Center was formed in 2011, realizing the vision for an educational program committed to access and excellence. The School shares TU Dance Center with the professional company, providing unparalleled opportunities for students of all ages to learn from working dancers, seasoned faculty, and distinguished guest artists who are frequently in residence with the company. The School is organized in three divisions: the Children & Teen Program introduces the joy of creative movement and beginning dance technique; the Pre-Professional Program trains aspiring dancers up to age 23 who are considering dance careers; and the Adult/Open Program welcomes everyone to join individual classes in a range of techniques including ballet, modern and African dance.

The School at TU Dance Center has served nearly 4,000 students and has provided \$690,000 in scholarships through the TU Dance Access Fund and various grants.

For more information go to www.tudance.org.

TU DANCE

EXCELLENCE | BELONGING | CREATIVITY | TRANSFORMATION

Sensible Existence

Dedicated to the memory of Sharron Lynn Williams

Originally commissioned in 2017 by the Rosemary and David Good Family Foundation.

The 2022 production of *Sensible Existence* is supported in part by a
Minnesota State Arts Board Tour grant.

Choreographer: Marcus Jarrell Willis

Writing Compositions: Tomos O'Sullivan

Artistic Team: Toni Pierce-Sands, Laurel Keen & Daonna Lewis

Original Choreography Restaging: Jake Lewis

Music: Steve Reich – Alarm Will Sound, Ossia & Alan Pierson; Steve Reich – Kristjan Jarvi &

MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra; Ryuichi Sakamoto & Alva Noto;

Johann Sebastian Bach – Hughes De Courson; James Blake

Lighting Designer: Burke Brown

Lighting Supervisor: Garvin Jellison

Costume Designer: Toni Pierce-Sands and Marcus Jarrell Willis

ASL Instructor: Ruth Saulsberry

ASL Assistant: Daonna Lewis

The Artists:

Sa'Nah Britt, Madison Elliott, Amarachi Valentina Korie, Joe LaLuzerne,

Samantha Meryhew, Connor Simone, Elliana Vesely (cover)

Part I

15 minutes intermission

Part II





Toni Pierce-Sands (Founder & Artistic Director) Prior to co-founding TU Dance, Minnesota native Toni Pierce-Sands performed with Minnesota Dance Theatre, Tanz Forum in Germany, Rick Odums in Paris, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, where she was a featured soloist in such signature pieces as *Revelations*, *Cry* and *Rainbow Round My Shoulder*. Her command of the Horton Technique has led to teaching posts throughout the United States and Europe. Toni directs programming and teaches classes at TU Dance Center in Saint Paul. She was a full-time core faculty member at the University of Minnesota for twenty years and also served as Director of

University Dance Theatre. Toni has been featured in COSMOPOLITAN Germany and GQ publications, the American Express Alvin Ailey commercial and the Lester Horton Technique instructional DVD series. She has written columns for Dance Studio Life magazine on a variety of pedagogical approaches for modern dance. Toni was awarded a 2004 McKnight Artist Fellowship in Dance, named the Sage Awards' "2011 Outstanding Dance Educator" and recognized with a 2013 Links Emerald Service Award for service in the arts. She was named as a 2015 USA Fellow, receiving the Knight Fellowship in Dance together with TU Dance co-founder Uri Sands. Toni was selected as a mentor for the 2018 Dance/USA Institute for Leadership Training and as a panelist for the 2018 Dance Miami Choreographers' Program.



Marcus Jarrell Willis (Choreographer) has performed with RIOULT, Dominic Walsh Dance Theater, Tania Pérez- Salas Compañía de Danza and Ailey II. Willis performed with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from 2008-2016, traveling around the world performing, teaching numerous masterclasses and participating through Outreach in various communities, both locally and abroad. As a teaching artist, he has engaged with Rambert Dance Professional Program, Tring Park Performing Arts School, TU Dance, Joffrey Southwest Dallas, Centre Chorégraphique James Carles, Amsterdam

Dance Centre and various training programs, universities and conservatoires, globally. Willis is a YoungArts Level 1 award recipient and Presidential Scholar Nominee. Willis has presented choreographic work in the 2009 TDDC Contemporary Dance Festival in NYC, The Ailey Dancer's Resource Fund performances, The Dance Gallery Festival, The Moving Beauty Series and Gdansk Festival Tańca in Poland. Commissions, residencies and film creations include works for Ailey II, TU Dance, NY Choreographic Institute, with dancers of New York City Ballet, Company Danzante, Ballet Cymru, The Juilliard School, SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Dance, The Ailey School, University of Minnesota, Lucia Marthas Institute for the Performing Arts, Rubicon Dance, COCA, Satellite Collective, The Dance Gallery Festival Level Up Commission in 2013 and The 92nd Y Dance Introduction Series, among others. He was named Best Choreographer for TU Dance creation, *Sensible Existence* in City Pages 2018 Best of the Twin Cities. Willis was the 2018/19 Leverhulme Choreography Fellow at Rambert Dance in London, during which time he completed the evening length solo creation *POM/POM*, *Portrait of Man/ Pieces of Me* and created work with selected dancers of Rambert 2. Most recently, he was appointed the role of Resident Choreographer for Ballet Cymru in Newport, Wales UK, where he recently launched the choreography initiative in partnership with Ballet Cymru, WIP (Works In Progress), which aims to bridge gaps between mid-career choreographers and venues in Wales. Synchronously, Willis is continuing the journey of building choreographic works for his independent dance performance project, MJ Willis Project-Inc.



Tomos O'Sullivan (Writer) Tomos O'Sullivan's first and most abiding ambition was to run away with the circus. Impressionable and restless, he was seduced by the lights and the music, the showmanship, the fleeting celebrity and the gypsy boys with their wild eyes. Born from Welsh and Irish stock and raised in the savage majesty of Cornwall, England, he inherited an innate love of mythology, nature and storytelling (and later, a dark tavern and a few too many drinks.) Adolescence would find the boy penning furious, impassioned prose about his plight as lone sensitive in a world full of wolves. Reason, or at least good taste, eventually prised him out of

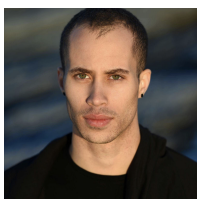
victim-consciousness and into alternative realms of literary inquiry. He read English Literature at the University of Brighton before traveling the world in search of answers to questions not yet posed. Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe will always be lovers he took and times he will never forget. His chequered career will baffle nobody more so than him. Bartender, waiter, cleaner, carer, painter and decorator and

questionable actor. Each absurd and each sacred. He has promised a novel for perhaps seventeen years but insists it is almost complete. Every day he awaits the circus, and every day he is grateful.



Laurel Keen (Artistic Associate) received her early dance training from Minnesota Dance Theater, School of American Ballet in New York, Dance Aspen School and Pacific Northwest Ballet School in Seattle. She spent a decade alongside Alonzo King as a company member with LINES Ballet, where she originated 21 roles, toured extensively throughout the U.S. and internationally, earned the Princess Grace Award, the Chris Hellman Dance Award and an Isadora Duncan Dance Award. Laurel returned to Minnesota in 2011 and earned her degree as a physical therapist assistant from St.

Catherine University while simultaneously developing her skills as a dance teaching artist in the Twin Cities and with LINES. She served as school director for The School at TU Dance Center from 2015-2021 and since expanding her own family over the past few years has transitioned to Artistic Associate with TU Dance, working closely on projects such as *Sensible Existence*. She is drawn to working with artists who share the goals of curiosity, discovery and transformation.



Jacob Lewis (Original Choreography Restaging) is a native of St. Louis, Missouri and received his dance training at the Center of Creative Arts (COCA) led by Lee Nolting. In 2010, he was inducted into the National Honor Society for Dance Arts and was a finalist for the NDEO Artistic Merit, Leadership and Artistic Award. He attended the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program and during his time in school performed in Alvin Ailey's "Memoria" during the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's NY City Center Season. Upon graduation, he joined Ailey II where he performed both classical and contemporary works, both nationally and internationally. In 2017 he joined TU Dance

and participated in the collaboration with Bon Iver's '*Come Through*,' which was performed at the Palace Theater (St. Paul, MN,) Hollywood Bowl and The Kennedy Center. As of 2021, Lewis has been dancing with the historic ballet company, Minnesota Dance Theater in Minneapolis where he has performed works by both Loyce and Lise Holton. He most recently has joined Repertory Dance Theater based in Salt Lake City, Utah.



Joseph Bingham (Production Manager) when not working with TU Dance, spends his day time as Co-Director of the Cowles Center for Dance. Some of his other production and touring credits include: NHL Winter Classic (Stage Manager); Bon Iver and TU Dance's *Come Through* (Production Stage Manager); The Walker Art Center's *Rock The Garden* (Assistant Production Manager); Alonzo King's Lines Ballet (Substitute Production Manager); NFL Honors Awards Show (Production Assistant); The Half Time show for the Minnesota Vikings inaugural home opener at US Bank Stadium (Assistant Stage Manager); Jason Moran's *Last Jazz Fest* (Production Stage Manager); Circus

Juventus (Stage Manager); Theatre Latte Da's *Steerage Song* (Assistant Stage Manager/Technical Director); as well as Continental Ballet, Threads Dance, Sage Awards, The Ordway and others.



Garvin Jellison (Stage Manager/Lighting Supervisor) is a freelance production manager and designer. A former dancer himself, clients include James Sewell Ballet, Minnesota Dance Theatre, Katha Dance Theatre, Black Label Movement, and Ballet Minnesota. Nationally, Garvin has worked in production management and lighting with Wild Kratts Live, Innovations Arts & Entertainment, Hubbard Street 2, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and Joffrey Ballet. Garvin holds a BFA in lighting design from The Theatre School at DePaul University, and is Head Electrics at The Cowles Center for Dance.



Burke Brown (Lighting Designer) Burke Brown's recent dance design includes work with La Scala Ballet, English National Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Bayerisches Staatsballett, Martha Graham Dance Company, Parsons Dance, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Houston Ballet, Ballet West, Compañía Nacional de Danza (Mexico), and Aszure Barton & Artists. His work has been presented at the Joyce Theater, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, New York City Center, Yerba Buena Center and across North America, Europe and Russia. In the

United States, his work in theater and opera includes projects with Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mabou Mines, Erratica, Ars Nova, NYSF-Public Theater, Baltimore Center Stage, Cleveland Playhouse, Magic Theatre, Two River Theater Company, and Playmakers Repertory Company. Outside of the US, his work includes productions at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the Golden Mask Festival in Moscow, the Seoul Performing Arts Festival in South Korea, and Erratica in London. Mr. Brown has a Bachelor's of Arts in International Studies and Theater Studies from Guilford College in Greensboro, NC. He received his Master's of Fine Arts from the Yale School of Drama. He is a member of United Scenic Artists and Wingspace Theatrical Design. He teaches in the Hunter College Dance Department in Manhattan. Originally from North Carolina, Burke Brown has lived in Beijing, Miami, New Haven and Brooklyn. He now lives in Jackson Heights, Queens with his wife and son.



Ruth Saulsberry (Black American Sign Language Instructor) The very cold outside during the winter, she was born on January 9th, 1961, and hearing in (Manhattan) New York City, New York. She grew up from a military and well-functioning family including with her hearing brothers and deaf sister. Then she turned 5 years old and became deaf because of German Measles under the disease of Rubella. She grew up in Catholic school for the deaf in 1975 her mother raised her childhood years communicating with homemade signs with a very good, high education she graduated with academic school in 1979. Few years later in 1986 she moved to Minnesota and her life changed for college purposes. She got her complete bachelor's degree and graduated in May 2000. Ruth Saulsberry, the founder of AASLS is an African American deaf woman with a passion for assuring equity and justice are paramount through providing interpreting for deaf people of color. Ms. Saulsberry has M.A in Christian's Thoughts. She was her Substitute Teacher license and on deaf hands for 21 years. In past years Ruth participated as a co-teacher in classes for students learning American Sign Language and made a transformation into Black American Sign Language journey. She is currently licensed as a Pastor and certified Chaplain with continuing my ministry to active my pastoral work serving the LORD. "Her voice passed on to her and gave her her empowerment." Therefore, her mother was her best education advocate. She has her mother's voice to maintain moving on everyday.



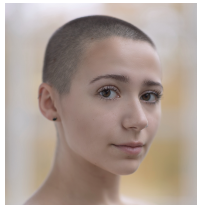
Daonna Lewis (Black American Sign Language Instructor Assistant) Daonna Lewis is a proud Saint Paul native. She obtained her Bachelors of Fine Arts from the University of Minnesota. At the age of seven she discovered her gift of dance through the praise dance ministry at Mount Olivet Baptist Church. She is a graduate from Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists. Daonna has studied at TU Dance Center since its opening in 2011 where she believes her dance career was mostly impacted. TU Dance provided a plethora of opportunities in her career; receiving a scholarship to train at Alvin Ailey Summer Intensive. She performed two works with the company for its 10th anniversary season at The Ordway. She created a choreographic work for The School at TU Dance Center. Daonna has traveled around the twin cities working alongside with the late Lewis E. Whitlock III and dancing for Minnesota Without Poverty. She was also a part of multiple productions in the twin cities; "The Color Purple" at Park Square Theater as the ensemble and dance coach, and "Annie" at The Ordway Theater as assistant choreographer. Daonna currently works as Administrative Associate at TU Dance and a dance instructor at The Workroom MN. Daonna began to learn American Sign Language in her early years from family, friends, peers, and in school. She continued her learning throughout high school and college. Daonna was introduced to Ruth Saulsberry early this year to be a student and learn to translate words and phrases from English to ASL, AASL, and BASL.

THE ARTISTS



Sa'Nah Britt, born in the Twin Cities, began her journey at The School at TU Dance Center as a student in 2014. She graduated from the Perpich Arts Highschool in 2020 and has continued to pursue and shape her passion at TU Dance as a pre-professional student and most recently as a teaching artist for the school, where she strives to inspire and encourage other young artists. During her time at TU Dance, Sa'Nah has performed in various works by Marcus Jarrell Willis, Gregory Dolbashian, Ronald K. Brown, Laurel Keen, Alanna Morris, Abdo Sayegh Rodriguez, Darrius Strong, Maurya Kerr, Leila Awadallah, Alia Kache, and Yusha Sorzano. Her training has included a

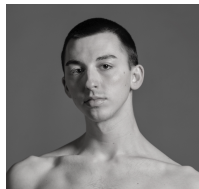
variety of techniques including African, ballet, modern, jazz, improvisation, krump, and contemporary. Sa'Nah is known for her ability to embrace a choreographers' vision and present it in a way that is both unique and captivating. She looks forward to other opportunities where she can continue to grow and develop as an artist.



Madison Elliott is a NY based dancer, performer, choreographer and teacher. She is originally from Sioux Falls, SD where she co-founded, and is now the Executive Director of an award winning nonprofit, The Headlights Theater (a pop-up/drive-in performing arts collective that helps uplift local artists while bringing the community together in a safe way during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond). She attended the University of North Carolina School of the Arts for High School and went on to receive her BFA in Dance and a Minor in Arts Management from SUNY Purchase College, class of 2020. Madison has worked with several companies in New York including HIVEWILD, Pocket Fuel Groovers and MeagMove. She has performed works by world renowned choreographers such as Doug Varone, Trisha Brown, Roderick George, Abby Zibkowski and many more. She has been featured in Dance Magazine for her dance film *Empty Vessel*, which has won 2 awards and been chosen for inclusion in the Future Dance Festival, Screen Dance International Festival, Astoria Film Festival, Portland Dance Film Fest and Lights Dance Festival. Madison also creates journals out of reused/recycled materials.



Amarachi Valentina Korie began her dance training at Baltimore County Youth Ballet at the age of 10. She attended Carver Center for the Arts and Technology and graduated as a 2014 Bill Gates Millennium Scholar. Ms. Korie then attended the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program and there she performed Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2016 and 2017 New York City Center seasons. Soon after she became a Company Member with Ailey II from 2018-2020. She has received scholarships to The School at Jacob's Pillow, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Joffrey Ballet School, and The Ailey School, having performed works by Robert Battle, Kyle Abraham, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Linda-Denise Fisher Harrell, and Emily Molnar. Ms. Korie is a 2-time regional NAACP ACT-SO competition gold medalist and Maryland All-State Dance awardee.



Joe LaLuzerne (Brooklyn Park, Minnesota) began dancing at age 8 at Summit Dance Shoppe, training competitively and studying ballet with Linda Muir Finney. Joe graduated from Texas Christian University in the Spring of 2021 where he obtained a BFA Ballet and a BA in Political Science. Joe has had the opportunity to work with choreographers LeeWei Chao, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Elizabeth Gillaspay, Susan Haag, Gabrielle Lamb, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Carmen Rozestraten, Keith Saunders, Amy Seiwert, Joshua Peugh, and Christian von Howard, among others. Joe has danced at summer intensives with Alonzo King's LINES Ballet, Jennifer Archibald's ArchCore40, BalletX, Dark Circles Contemporary Dance: Arts Lab Desert Peaks, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Kansas City Ballet, and most recently with The School at Jacob's Pillow as a member of their Contemporary Ballet Performance Ensemble under the direction of Annabelle Lopez Ochoa. After the completion of his undergraduate studies Joe attended Milano Contemporary Ballet's International Training Program in Milan, Italy, before returning to Minnesota and joining TU Dance for this project.



Samantha Meryhew, a Saint Paul native, is currently a company member at Shapiro and Smith Dance, and was a former Apprentice at TU Dance Center. In 2011, she started her training towards her professional career as part of the first generation of The School at TU Dance. She has performed in works by Garth Fagan, Brian Brooks, Marcus Jarrell Willis, and Kjara Staric Wurst. She has also been a guest artist with Shapiro and Smith Dance performing in their production of *Bolero* in the Spring of 2017 and 2018. She has attended summer programs at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, Complexions Dance, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. She is proficient in classical and contemporary ballet, modern, and African dance. Noted often as a hard worker and a quick learner, she strives to delve deep into the physicality and emotional nuances of the movement presented to her. Samantha has a Bachelor of Art in Dance and Art from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.



Connor Simone received training at Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists, the TU Dance School, and the University of Minnesota. Connor is a current member of James Sewell Ballet in Minneapolis and has previously danced with TU Dance, Threads Dance Project, and the University of Minnesota Dance Theatre. He has performed works by artists such as Marcus Willis, Kjara Wurst, Gregory Dolbashian, Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, Will Couture, Carl Flink, Sidra Bell, Maurya Kerr, and Michael Walters among others. Alongside performing, Connor has worked for several arts organizations across the Twin Cities in IT and web development and is also teaching ballet for Eleve' Performing Arts

Center.



Elliana Vesely (cover) is a Twin Cities, MN based dance artist who grew up in a small town in Northern Wisconsin. As of May of 2020, she holds a B.A. in dance from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. She complemented this degree with studies in biology and health & wellness promotion, receiving minors in both. While at the U of M, Elliana was cast in works by acclaimed artists; Leah Nelson, Joan Smith, Robert Moses, Eko Supriyanto, Kjara Wurst and Carl Flink. While in school, she also had the pleasure of working with Crash Dance Company, Shapiro and Smith Dance and performed in the 2018 North-Central American College Dance Association Gala. Elliana is honored to have been a recipient of the Beth Hope Suran Scholarship (2016-2020) and the Jean Congdon Scholarship (2019-2020). She is ecstatic to be dancing with Shapiro and Smith Dance, Black Label Movement, and ARENA Dances as a company member. Elliana has most recently toured with *Burning Air* by Shapiro and Smith Dance and *run with me* by ARENA Dances.



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We are very grateful for the generosity of individuals for their support of TU Dance. To view a list of our donors please [click here](#). For information on how you can support TU Dance, please visit tudance.org/giving or contact Abdo Sayegh Rodríguez at 651-724-9708 or abdo.sayegh@tudance.org. TU Dance is a non-profit organization participating in the Thrivent Choice Dollars, PayPal Giving Fund and Amazon Smile programs.

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TU Dance is a member of The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) and Dance/USA.



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PHOTO CREDITS

Photos (top to bottom):

Former company member Jacob Lewis by Graham Tolbert Photo; Marcus Jarrell Willis and former company member Taylor Collier by Yuval Moyal; *Sensible Existence* cast by Canaan Mattson.

Toni Pierce Sands by Michael Slobodian; Marcus Jarrell Willis by Andrew Eccles; Tomos O'Sullivan by Tomos O'Sullivan; Laurel Keen by Mark Buenaflor; Jacob Lewis by Michael Young; Joseph Bingham courtesy of Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts; Garvin Jellison courtesy of Garvin Jellison; Burke Brown courtesy of Burke Brown; Ruth Saulsberry by Shalynn Bleicher; Daonna Lewis by Bill Cameron



The Artists: Sa'Nah Britt by Canaan Mattson, Madison Elliott by Alice Chacon, Amarachi Korie by Nir Arieli, Joe LaLuzerne by @benedettepitscheider, Samantha Meryhew by Blake Nellis, Connor Simone by Isabel Fajardo, and Elliana Vesely by Armour Photography.

SENSIBLE EXISTENCE WRITINGS AND LYRICS

When We're Older

James Blake

If the storm comes, if we burn up
If the wells run dry
You're my reason to believe in
Another life

If it all ends, and it's over
If the sky falls fire
Best believe me, you will see me
On the other side

And if the earth shakes
Like the big 'quake
And our lives flash by
You're the first thing

I'll be seeking
With these arms of mine
And when we're older
And we're ready

To leave Earth behind
Here's to hopin'
It's exactly
At the same damn time

TASTE

Tomos O'Sullivan

"It's for your own good"
Earnest words from the waiting room at Wits End
Where they will fix me
Where they bring tea like it's holy water
Where they write notes like they're bibles
Where they have me announce myself in circles
Where they label so flippant my affliction
Where I sit among strangers with strange affiliations.
Where we the bare-naked ducklings flock beside starched-suited quacks who cage us like
birds

Where I hug tight my societal straightjacket, its neckline chewed threadbare
Better off here than anywhere elsewhere.
Away from inescapable temptation.
Away from faith-held, faithless condemnation
Impassioned by something beyond comprehension

They cannot invest in something they've no interest in
Interesting.
Now Approaching
Eyes narrowed
Teeth clamped like animal traps.
They scorn
They spit

They act out the baying mob they half-remember from some ancient play.
Pitchforks
Beacons
Chants like jingles without the cheer
Small town, big town, world-wide indignation
Rightful, wilful, collective, communal invitation

And I only ate a crayon...

We are not in fact countries divided by war nor sport
You had this spirit too
Think.
It's museumed somewhere in your memory
You had like me, this bravery
There is after all, nothing more covetable
Nor more dangerous a trait to possess
Than what my fabled tongue does best
Pick your poison
Make your choice
Coke floats or street coke
Lemon drops or acid tabs
Fire, heat, buttercream
Lemongrass, vanilla bean
At labyrinthine markets meet
Barter for the thrills you seek

Remember not the quick dab, 20 pack, gin laced nights of misspent meaning-searching
Remember instead the sugared treats, the midnight feasts, the magic of adolescent
yearning

Remember not the salt-sweat geographies of unsexy, uninvited bodies
But the watermelon lipgloss of a formative first kiss that leaves you giddy
Rinse your mouth out.
Spit out the shit, the bitterness
Savour the peppermint
Go back
With caution
Remember exploring
I cannot unremember this
That's why I examine every surface
For this tongue is not the least discerning
They called it sin, I called it learning
But although not sick, I will get sick without sick or sinister intention

I need surveillance,
Boundaries
That's why I need this intervention

HEARING

Tomos O'Sullivan

Dear John,

Mother calls it the most frightful war she's seen in all her years.

She switches off the broadcast. Says the radio is for songs, not sorrow. She's trying to avert my mind from escaping down its well-trodden rabbit hole of horror, lost limbs and last words and gunfire, an echo chamber of deafening bombs and whispered prayers.

Strangely I think of the condition of your uniform, whether its proud fit is now muddied, torn, soiled. I wonder how much your hair has grown and whether it is now peppered with grey from all the fuss.

I think of you all of the time, of course.

Before I'm fully awake, I hear ordinary sounds. Birdsong, a bicycle somewhere in the distance, the tinkle of a teaspoon against china. Little, domestic sounds of a life we promised each other. I forget for just a minute, quite what is going on, all around us.

Remember John when we took the train to Wits End? Giddy and careless in the throws of early love. Seeking refuge in that old pub as the rain thundered against the windows, the ones that looked out to sea. The crackling fire. The popping of the cork. The sound of good red filling our glasses.

I said I loved you then and I meant it.

Did you even hear it?

That's where I'm heading with this John.
This is important.
Even before all this, you stopped listening.

The absence of laughter.
Mine. Yours. Ours shared.
The slow curtailing of our pet names for one another, formerly rolled out rhythmically, laced with love.
The arrival of practicality. Of hard facts.
The wilting of dreams, once wild and rambling.
Entirely, impossibly possible.
Each other's biggest cheerleaders.
The secret sounds of pleasure.
Almost mythical now.
Mine. Yours. Ours shared.

And Our song.
Even that stopped playing.

You stopped it before it even started.

We'll never make it John, we haven't the language.

I read the book and you watched the movie.

To put it plainly John, you snore and I do not. And even though you'd kiss me on the head each morning and say 'sorry if I kept you up last night', you never understood the sleepless, nerve-needed, all but murderous person that lay on the other side of our bed. Taunted by your resting. Ears bashed with palms and pillows to no avail. Listening.

I hope you survive all of this John. You are a good man. I hope you find someone whose lilting accent never becomes anything less than magical. Who makes your heart feel like an orchestra is at play within it. Whose words are kind and considered, not careless and cutting, as mine were. For despite all my listening, what I actually said out loud was often tone-deaf and deafening. You deserve far more than this letter. I'm supposed to bestow music and poetry John. Not this. I'm speechless and stationary, with and without you. A coward.

Come back alive John and find somebody who makes you feel it every single day.
Somebody who snores every bit as loudly as you do.

Forever and always,
Apollo.

TOUCH & SMELL

Tomos O'Sullivan

That dream again

The one I've had at every red light and wrong turn since early childhood.

The castle that towers above the kingdom, perhaps above the entire world. Me, at the top-most spire. Townsfolk far below, kaleidoscopic. A furious wind. Nothing but jagged rock with which to steady myself. I clutch my chest, right where the heart-shaped locked rests. Move over to my forearm and try for a pinch. Nothing. Only a matter of time now. This is the part I fall. Tiny little fetal fists box on drums in the pit of my stomach. Any. Minute. Now.

But instead of the fall, the storm gathers up and hurls skyward all the scents from the rose garden below and with it all the perfumes I know to be you, without even turning. Unmistakable.

Coconut shampoo and bonfire, lavender, and fresh coffee, barbecue smoke, cut grass, honest sweat and hot pavement and jasmine. It's every season of our shared existence.

I run to you. Give you all of my power in my holding. All this touch I've been withholding. Holding.
And holding.

I break only to trace the curvature of your face, to caress your hair, like braided sweet grass.
Map my fingerprints upon your skin, hope they impress like tattoos. You've been gone so
Long.

Is this purgatory?

You smile, shake your head.

Is this my death?

You smile. You tell me I'm more sensible than that.

Kind eyes.

You are sad my love. You are lost. You've stopped exploring.

Stopped marvelling.

You think your time has passed.

It hasn't.

Our senses need training and sharing, not isolating.

An ensemble cast, the sum of its parts. Each extraordinary.

If only you knew how much you are needed.

You are vital.

Please don't give up.

It's all still to play for.

And call Mother, she worries.

I grip your hand, a wordless expression of my understanding.

The storm has passed. The sun melts pink upon its orange canvas. The sweet smell of nature
permeates our party in the heavens, at Wits End

Whenever I'm here I always fall

Your soft laugh

I'm not here to push you

I'm just here to tell you...

WAKE UP.

SIGHT

Tomos O'Sullivan

They rest.

Soft darling eyelids upon soft linen sheets

Steady breaths, exceptionally even, each

Reassuringly, vitally, visibly even

At last granted rapture in sleep's sweet reprieve

Their dreams in soft-focus, nursery-coloured
Feather-light films
Each enduringly unencumbered
Unbroken by any foresight of harm nor horror
Lullabied in a milky-bellied, ignorant slumber
Unaware of unfolding capital or kitchen sink drama
Their landscape no bigger than this cot in this corner

The undersung wonder of distilled disconnection
The theory of focus without macro, without micro-dissection
But blessed
To just simply rest
Where weary limbs station, submit to be strengthened
Where resources relent, resign to be sharpened.
Where faculties surrender, restore to factory settings
Where weaponry's carved for my soldiers, my only concession

Of whom I long for only golden perception

Upon whose tomorrow I bestow, a cocktail reception
Whom I long to forewarn of adversarial deception
Advice paper thin, a suggestion, a mere stage direction

May their reds be projected in ruby slipper technicolour
Not the rust-red, bloodshed of some murdered minor
May their greys be the ashes, the embers of a mighty campfire
And not the rubble-ash, wreckage-ash of two fallen towers
The hues of their blues an ocean side, lantern-lit harbour
Not storm-ravaged, shipwrecked blue-lipped, washed up cadavers
But beautiful
Unburdened
Unbroken things

Kind eyes
The kind that marvel at constellations
The kind that compliment your very creation
May they bask, lemon-oiled in their mercenary 20/20
Not inherit this un-policed, panoramic purgatory
May they run for the bus before they run for office
May they climb backyard trees before they climb corporate ladders
May they love without fear and live without limit
May their kinfolk protect them from what's outside of my remit
When this primal need to be needed is all but depleted...
And when they finally see and cannot un-see it
Am I needed?

Lost Angel Nights
James Blake

Whatever makes you
Whatever makes you feel

Lost angel nights
Never jaded eyes
Envious, no crime
Away from me's just fine
Lost angel nights
Never jaded eyes
Envious, no crime
Away from me's just fine

Guess I've been in my own way
But in my own way
I kept you going
I kept you going for us
We had so much going for us

And I've been losing my place
And in my place
A thousand imitations rose up
And I hope it's not too late to make up for all those

Lost angel nights
Never jaded eyes
Envious, no crime
Away from me's just fine
Lost angel nights
Never jaded eyes
Envious, no crime
Away from me's just fine

And so you slept all day
The world doesn't wait
And it kept on going
It kept on going around us
We had so much going for us
And I was losing my place (oh)
And in my place (oh)
A thousand imitations rose up
And I hope it's not too late
To make up for all those

Lost angel nights (I know you really had to fight)
Never jaded eyes (I know you really had to listen)
Envious, no crime (over to the other side)
Away from me's just fine (over to the other side)
Lost angel nights (I know you really had to fight)
Never jaded eyes (I know you really had to listen)
Envious, no crime (over to the other side)
Away from me's just fine (over to the other side)

I fell right in
I fell right in
I fell right in
Into the world with you
