Virago-Man Dem

Cynthia Oliver

Music by Jason Finkelman
Visual art by Black Kirby
(John Jennings and Stacey Robinson)
Projections and animations by John Boesche
Costume design by Susan Becker
Lighting design by Amanda K. Ringger

DATES: OCT 25—28 at 7:30pm
LOCATION: BAM Fisher (Fishman Space)
RUN TIME: Approx 1hr, 15mins

#BAMNextWave
Virago-Man Dem

Conception and Direction
Cynthia Oliver

Choreography
Cynthia Oliver with sections in collaboration with the dancers

Composer/Performer
Jason Finkelman

Visual art
Black Kirby
(John Jennings and Stacey Robinson)

Media design
John Boesche

Costume design
Susan Becker

Lighting design
Amanda K. Ringger

Stage Manager:
Valerie Oliveiro

Company Manager:
Cornelio Casaclang

Wardrobe Coordinator:
Carolyn Meckha Cherry

Performers
Duane Cyrus
Jonathan Gonzalez
Niall Noel Jones
Ni’Ja Whitson

Special thanks to Beth Hull and Alice Yumi Sinzato for additional wardrobe assistance.

Texts, directed by Cynthia Oliver, are improvisational narratives grounded in the lived experience of the dancers.

Vocals by Brandon T. Washington, additional percussion by John Wieczorek, guitar by Geoff Gersh, and drums by Gordon Kay. The recording “If I Betray” by Midnite is used with permission from I-Grade Records, St. Croix, USVI.

Virago-Man Dem was supported in part by research and development residencies at New Waves Institute in collaborations with Dancing While Black in Trinidad W.I.; the Maggie Allee National Center for Choreography at Florida State University; Vermont Performance Lab with major support from the National Endowment for the Arts; Gina Gibney Dance; the Abrons Arts Center; with commissioning funds from The MAP Fund, a program of Creative Capital supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; The National Performance Network’s Creation Fund; The New England Foundation for the Arts, National Dance Project Fund—made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Dance Project with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; and the Edwards Arts Fund.

Virago-Man Dem is a National Performance Network (NPN) Creation Fund Project co-commissioned by Dance Place (DC) in partnership with the Painted Bride Art Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Kelley Strayhorn Theatre, and NPN. The Creation Fund is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency).

For more information: npnweb.org
Like all of my works, this project has been long in the making. It was born out of long, loving, and complicated relationships with black men in the multiple worlds in which I live. It was jettisoned into importance with the birth of my son and my observations of what he and other young men of color have to navigate as they make their way in the world. It was then stretched to include masculinities performed by those of us not born male, but for whom male identity might feel more right with our being—or for whom the breadth of possibilities of our gender performance included what we might sometimes presume male. It was born out of a desire to offer to the world another view of black masculinity that is more nuanced and flexible and stylish and funny and tender and rich than those we are persistently burdened with in the contemporary American landscape. So this work for me is an act of love. I am interested in choreographing both that which folks are wont to navigate in their daily lives, and that which we might have to already be in the process of exceeding, transiting, aspiring for something we do not yet know, and one doesn't have to necessarily be a biological man to do or want or be so. With these ideas circulating, I offer this showing as a presentation of ideas, those which have been consistent with the work since its beginning and those with which I am/we are wrestling anew. I welcome your eyes on this iteration.

Virago-Man Dem is dedicated to the memory of William G. Montgomery, my cousin, friend, and fierce NYC cyclist, a brilliant man who disguised his brilliance in humor, a dedicated father, caretaker, and advocate who we lost this year to cancer. Bill was a faithful fan of my work. His smiling face alongside his life partner Jennafer D’Alvia would be waiting to greet me after every production here in NYC. I will miss him.

This is for Bill.

—Cynthia Oliver
CYNTHIA OLIVER
Conception/Direction/Choreography

Cynthia Oliver creates performance collages that move from dance to word to sound and back again toward an eclectic and provocative dance theater. A Bronx-born, Virgin Island-reared performer, she incorporates the textures of Caribbean performance with African and American aesthetic sensibilities. She has been awarded and/or commissioned by the Franklin Furnace, the Puffin Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, Edward and Sally Van Lier Fund for Minority Artists, New York State Council on the Arts, 92Y Harkness Dance Center, Performance Space 122, Dance Theater Workshop/New York Live Arts, the National Performance Network, Creative Capital, the Rockefeller/Doris Duke MAP Fund, New England Foundation for the Arts (NDP), the Pew Charitable Trust, the University of Illinois Research Board, and the Illinois Arts Council. Her dance theater work has been performed across the country in festivals and spaces including the Public Theater, the Kitchen, Performance Space 122, Dance Theater Workshop, Danspace Project at St. Mark’s Church, and Aaron Davis Hall in New York City, NOCCA in New Orleans, Links Hall and Hothouse in Chicago, the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in Urbana, IL, the Central District Forum for Arts & Ideas in Seattle, the Dance Place in Washington DC, the Painted Bride Arts Center in Philadelphia, and Bates Dance Festival in Lewiston, ME, among many others. Her choreography for theater has been performed at Minnesota’s Penumbra and Pillsbury House Theaters, New York’s La MaMa Etc., Syncronicity Space, and Aaron Davis Hall. She has danced with Theatre Dance Inc. where she was mentored by Atti van den Berg (originally of Kurt Jooss Dance Theatre) and later the Caribbean Dance Company of St. Croix, VI. In addition to Oliver’s performance work, she holds a PhD in performance studies from New York University. Her scholarly work has focused on performance in the Anglophone Caribbean. She has taught at New York University’s department of drama/Tisch School of the Arts, the Newcomb Summer Dance Intensive at Tulane University, Florida State University, and the dance department at University of Utah. She is director of the MFA program, professor of dance, and newly minted Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Humanities, Arts, and Related Fields at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

SUSAN BECKER
Costume Design

Susan Becker works as a designer, artist, and educator in the field of fashion and costume. For the past 20 years she has designed for traditional and experimental settings, from the fashion industry to collaborations on stage, film, and site-specific projects. Recent collaborators include artists Deke Weaver and Jennifer Allen (ELEPHANT, WOLF, and BEAR), choreographers Tere O’Connor (Sister), Sara Hook (Bored Houseguests), Cynthia Oliver (BOOM!, Virago), and Jennifer Monson (Live Who’s Who
In addition to her design work, Becker has also taught extensively, including past courses for the Rhode Island School of Design and a current appointment as lecturer at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she is in her 11th year.

JOHN BOESCHE
Media Design

John Boesche has created projected images for more than 180 dance, opera, theater, and music productions and is very pleased to be working with Cynthia Oliver Company Dance Theatre. Designs for dance include the Joffrey Ballet, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, Lucky Plush Productions, Mordine & Company, and Erica Mott Productions, among others. His scenic and media designs for regional theater include Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Geffen Playhouse (LA), Goodman Theater, Lookingglass Theater, McCarter Theatre (Princeton), New York Shakespeare Festival (NYC), Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Steppenwolf Theatre, among others. Boesche has received the Merritt Award for Excellence in Design and Collaboration, three Joseph Jefferson Awards for his theater designs, a Metro DC Dance Award, and a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for video design. He is the chair of Digital Media for Live Performance at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

CORNELIO D. CASACLLANG
Company Manager

Cornelio D. Casacllang has worked with Cynthia Oliver/Coco Dance Theatre since 2008. He has worked as a production and company manager, including as the events director for the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois. When not working on the logistics for Virago-Man Dem, he does logistics analysis for a Swedish home furnishings company. He hails from Chicago via Baguio, the Philippines.

CAROLYN MECKHA CHERRY
Wardrobe Coordinator

Carolyn “Meckha” Cherry was born in Jacksonville, FL and raised in the Bronx. She holds a BA in theater education, from CUNY-Queens College. Cherry’s initial introduction to sewing was by her mother; however, she discovered her real love of costume design in 1997 while working with choreographer Kevin Iega Jeff, founder of Deeply Rooted Dance Theater. Continuing her love for costume design in the world of dance, she worked with Ronald K. Brown/EVIDENCE, A Dance Company, and Cynthia Oliver Company Dance Theatre as both a wardrobe supervisor and costume designer. Throughout Cherry’s career her designs have found their way into the performances of Phladanco Dance Company (choreography by Ronald K. Brown), Camille A. Brown and Dancers, Alvin Ailey II American Dance Theater (choreography by Camille A. Brown and Bridget L. Moore), and Urban Bush Women (choreography by Camille A. Brown). Additionally, she has designed for some of the most prestigious dance schools in New York City including Mind Builders, Harlem School of the Arts, Professional Center for the Arts, L. De. Dance School (NJ), and Abundance Academy of Dance. As a dedicated teacher, she also makes time to teach sewing and theater to children in urban communities.
DUANE CYRUS
Performer

Duane Cyrus (NYC) is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and the artistic director of Theatre of Movement, an arts collaborative. He has performed with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Martha Graham Dance Company, The Lion King (original London cast), and Carousel (US tour) as well as domestic and international touring with Cyrus Art Production. Cyrus is the co-author and editor of the book Vital Grace—The Black Male Dancer, a photographic celebration of black men in dance. A graduate of the Juilliard School (BFA) and the University of Illinois (MFA), Cyrus is also a recipient of the Princess Grace Foundation award for emerging artists, Coleman Entrepreneurship Fellowship, and the North Carolina Arts Council’s Choreographer Fellowship. Cyrus choreographs, performs, and teaches extensively throughout the US and abroad. He has served on faculty for the Joffrey/New School BFA Program, the Hartt School Actor’s Training Program, summer intensives with American Ballet Theatre, Aileycamp, and North Carolina Dance Theatre, and was a visiting lecturer at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Cyrus was awarded the 2009 University Dance Educator of the Year by the North Carolina Alliance for Athletics, Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (for UNCG), the United Arts Council of Greater Greensboro, Greensboro Bicentennial Commission, and Bricolage Arts Festival among others. Cyrus and his team were the first place winners for the Anne Fulton Carter Business Plan Competition. With his award-winning plan he opened the Access to Art Academy providing professional level training for performing artists in the Greensboro Triad Region for one year. Duane Cyrus continues to produce performances, outreach programs, and collaborative projects around the country. His recent projects include Evening with the Creative Class and Comanche: Hero Complexities, a multidisciplinary work inspired by the legacy of US Coast Guard hero Charles W. David Jr.
theatreofmovement.org

JASON FINKELMAN
Composer/Performer

Jason Finkelman’s artistic concerns focus on improvised music, cross-cultural collaborative projects, and composition for dance, theater, and film. A Philadelphia-born percussionist, Finkelman performs on African and Brazilian instruments handcrafted by Adimu Kuumba, specializing on the berimbau. Finkelman employs laptop electronics to manipulate original samples of his acoustic instruments, creating a personalized ambient, avant world sound inspired by his trio Straylight (founded in 1992) and performs with a host of genre-blurring improvisers from Urbana-Champaign. Finkelman’s extensive work spans over 20 years with choreographer Cynthia Oliver and includes BOOM! (2014—15) and the Bessie Award-winning performances SHEMAD (2000) and Death’s Door (1996). An accompanist for UI department of dance since 2000, Finkelman directs Global Arts Performance Initiatives, an engagement program of Krannert Center for the Performing Arts.
JONATHAN GONZALEZ  
Performer  
Jonathan Gonzalez is a choreographer and Bessie-nominated performer based in his native New York City. He has been a New York Live Arts Fresh Tracks Artist in collaboration with EmmaGrace Skove-Epes, BAX/Dancing While Black Fellow under the direction of Paloma McGregor, Diebold Award recipient for distinction in choreography and performance, Rema Hort Mann Foundation nominee, as well as a POSSE Leadership and Bessie Schönberg Scholar. He is currently a BAX/SUBMERGE! artist under the curation of Ali Rosa-Salas’ season Break Time. He has performed in the works of Ligia Lewis, Alex Baczyinski-Jenkins, Isabel Lewis, Phillip Howe, Ni’Ja Whitson, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, and Grisha Coleman, among others. He is a graduate of Trinity College, Trinity Laban Conservatoire, and holds an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College.

JOHN JENNINGS  
Black Kirby/Visual Art  
John Jennings is a professor of media and cultural studies at the University of California at Riverside. His work centers around intersectional narratives regarding identity politics and popular media. Jennings is co-editor of the Eisner Award-winning collection The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art and co-founder/organizer of the Schomburg Center’s Black Comic Book Festival in Harlem. He is co-founder and organizer of the MLK NorCal’s Black Comix Arts Festival in San Francisco and SOL-CON: The Brown and Black Comix Expo at the Ohio State University. Jennings is a 2016 Nasir Jones Hip-Hop Studies Fellow with the Hutchins Center at Harvard University. Jennings’ current projects include the hip-hop adventure comic Kid Code: Channel Zero, the supernatural crime noir story Blue Hand Mojo, and The New York Times best-selling graphic novel adaptation of Octavia Butler’s classic dark fantasy novel Kindred.

NIALL NOEL JONES  
Performer  
Niall Jones’ research slips between performance and visual art practices engaging disorientation, pleasure, and materiality as experiential frameworks for considering structures of time and exhaustion and impermanence. Jones works as assistant director and creative producer in the school of dance at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and lives in Brooklyn.

VALERIE OLIVEIRO  
Stage Manager  
Valerie Oliveiro is an artist based in Minneapolis, MN and originally from Singapore. This year, she is stage managing for Cynthia Oliver, Bebe Miller, and Dance Heginbotham. She recently designed lighting for Rosy Simas [Skin(s)] at Intermedia Arts (Minneapolis) and at La Pena (Berkeley, CA). She also recently performed in the work of Jennifer Monson (In Tow) and Morgan Thorson (Still Life), and she will perform in new works by Thorson and Simas in 2018.
AMANDA K. RINGGER  
Lighting Design

Amanda K. Ringger has lived in New York since 1997, designing locally, nationally, and internationally with such artists as Faye Driscoll, Doug Elkins, Cynthia Oliver, Jennifer Archibald, Antonio Ramos, LMnO3, Nora Chipaumire, Julian Barnett, Alexandra Beller, Deborah Lohse, Laura Peterson, Donnell Oakley, Molly Poerstel, Kota Yamazaki, 10 Hairy Legs, Tiffany Mills, Darrah Carr, and cakeface, among others. She received a BA from Goucher College in Baltimore, MD and an MFA in lighting design from Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. She is the recipient of a 2009 Bessie Award for her collaboration on Faye Driscoll’s *837 Venice Boulevard* at HERE Arts Center.

STACEY ROBINSON  
Black Kirby/Visual Art

Stacey Robinson is an assistant professor teaching graphic design and illustration at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and is an Arthur Schomburg fellow who completed his MFA at the University at Buffalo. His work discusses ideas of “Black Utopias” as spaces of conflict resolution away from colonial influence by considering black, affluent, self-sustaining communities; black protest movements; and the art movements that document them.

As part of the collaborative team Black Kirby with artist John Jennings, he creates graphic novels, gallery exhibitions, and lectures that deconstruct the work of artist Jack Kirby to re-imagine black resistance spaces inspired by hip-hop, religion, the arts, and sciences. With MotherBoxx Studios, a design team facilitated by Black Kirby, he collaborates with an amalgam of artists and writers to facilitate graphic novels, comic conventions, and to curate exhibitions.


NI’JA WHITSON  
Performer

An award-winning interdisciplinary artist, Bessie-nominated performer, and writer, gender queer artist Ni’Ja Whitson (MFA), has been referred to as “majestic” and “magnetic” by *The New York Times*, and recognized by *Brooklyn Magazine* as a culture influencer. They have received honors across disciplines and collaborate with notables in experimental and conventional theater, dance, visual art, and music. Project collaborations include a close partnership with Douglas Ewart, including other leaders such as Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Cynthia Oliver, Charlotte Brathwaite, Sharon Bridgforth, Dianne McIntyre, Regina Taylor, Marjani Forté-Saunders, Byron Au Yong, and Aaron Jafferis. Ni’Ja Whitson is an assistant professor at the University of California at Riverside and is founder/artistic director of The NWA Project. nijawhitson.com
Thanks!

This work has benefitted from the generosity of thought, ideas, place, cash, and emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual support from many, many directions. I thank first and foremost my brilliant collaborators who have brought their best to this work, who have asked me the hard questions, who have offered elements I could not have dreamed, and brought this work into beautiful fruition.

The performers who give EVERYTHING! They are phenomenal, and I could not do this work without them. I bow at their feet. They have brought their best, challenged, and stretched me so that I, too, have to bring my best, and we birth this together. To Makeda Thomas and New Waves Institute, the first to recognize and offer me a place and beautiful people with whom I could experiment and consider what I wanted to do; to sister Paloma McGregor who partnered with New Waves in support. While in Trinidad there were the folks whose generosity fueled my confidence and fed me with great questions and commentary—Robert Young, Mark Eastman, Ricardo Valentine, Orlando Hunter, Michael Mortley. My host and dear friend Benny Gomes and his friend who soon became mine, Carol La Chapelle. My informal casting director(!), Nibia Pastrana Santiago from PR—a little further north in the archipelago; the folks without whom I would not have been able to process this work in the rich and full ways we have been afforded over the past two years, Vermont Performance Lab (Sara Coffey!, Katherine, and Dave), and the artists and activists we encountered there—Curtiss Reid and Donald Mutebi; Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (Carla Peterson, Ansje Burdick, Chris Cameron, Afua, and Mary and team), the wonderful scholars artists and community activists I encountered at FSU as a Mellon Fellow, including of course the hospitality of my dear friend Darrell Jones, and new friend Summer Hill Seven. In Illinois, I had the support of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and Terry Ciofalo, Level 21—our production arm, and Sam Smith, my brother in all things community; Dance at Illinois and my colleagues and Department Head, Jan Erkert; longtime supporter and friend Craig Peterson for proposing that I do this project in the first place and his ongoing support since the 1990s; Gina Gibney and Gibney Dance for space and time; American Realness for our process presentation opportunity at APAP 2017; National Performance Network Creation Fund; the Doris Duke Multi Arts Production (MAP) Fund, and the Edwards Arts Fund…And I would be remiss if I didn’t thank Caryn Hodge, my childhood friend from St. Croix who first brought up the term “Virago” in a conversation we were having on island, and gave me the spark that led to the title of the piece. I count on my longtime friendships and family to help me retain the memories that float through my work and inspire its naming, its undercurrents, its backbone. And many, many thanks to Joe Melillo and the many careful and generous hands at BAM that have offered this beautiful space for this work to be seen in just the right setting it needed at just the right time. I am grateful.
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