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# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Dance as Protest

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, June 17th, 2020

It seems to me dance is needed more urgently than ever these days. What language is there that is more universal, more visceral, and more immediate with which to try to make sense of the senseless violence and violations happening in our world today? How else do we respond when there is a deluge of circumstances and events — seemingly daily — that challenge so many of our collective notions of common sense, dignity, humanity, and the rights of all people to live freely?

Dance is primal. We all have bodies, and most of us can move in some capacity, even if just our hands and arms which are so eloquent in delivering and emphasizing emotion. As Twyla Tharp once said so astutely, *“Dance is simply the refinement of human movement – walking, running, and jumping. We are all experts.”*

I am happy to see dance come into the streets and be part of the action and language of today’s Black Lives Matter protests, even at a time when dance communities are talking and often arguing amongst themselves about white privilege and leveling the playing field in terms of money, recognition, and opportunity. And so much of what has been seen in these protests includes dance forms that originated in the Black community. The Electric Slide, Krumping, Hip Hop... many of these are related to, influenced, and preceded by dances that were historically integral to protest, like Stepping, Pantsula, and much more. Today there have been countless examples, many coming through on Instagram and Facebook. What emerges range from spontaneous dances integrated amidst the marchers as they navigate the streets, or pre-arranged dance events like “Dance for George” organized in NY by two dancers (Sheen Jamal and Alsion Bedell aka Buttons), to incidents in which officers of the National Guard jumped into dance lines of the Macarena — seemingly in solidarity with protestors. Police officers at one protest in California actually attempted to arrest a man for dancing in the streets for exercise. WTF?

But dance is showing up. It is simultaneously a vehicle of and part of the dialogue for change. And I believe that is as it should and *must* be.

As Twyla Tharp also said: *“Life is about moving, it’s about change. And when things stop doing that they’re dead.”*

Let’s NOT stop.

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