

Cultural Daily

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Dare to Dance in Public Winners: Pedestrian Wanderlust for Best Raw & Best Interface with Camera

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, March 21st, 2018

This year, New York based non-profit Pedestrian Wanderlust wowed the judges by bringing the notion of daring to dance in public to a new level of audience engagement. As a result, they took home two **Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival** awards: Best Raw Film for **Nicole Wolcott – Washington Square Park**, and Best Interface with Camera for **Bethesda Fountain Group Shoot**. We applaud them!

With their madcap recipe of performing largely spontaneous dances amongst an unsuspecting public captured in unedited, 360-degree style camera work, Pedestrian Wanderlust's short films are evidence of the beauty of what happens when the unpredictable, the mundane, and the meaningful collide. Rami Shafi, the mastermind behind Pedestrian Wanderlust and I actually met several months ago, before we launched round two of **Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival** because there was a lot of shared common ground (pun intended) – a desire to make dance happen in public spaces. And of course after winning two **D2D** fest awards, we found Rami more than happy to answer our questions, which he does eloquently.

Nicole in Washington Square Park

SE: *How did you come to make this film? What were the inspirations for, and/or ideas behind it?*

RS: Nicole Wolcott's **Washington Square Park** shoot was originally part of a barter. I was seeking a dancer to lead the movement class for our next dance party on behalf of my community building dance-based non-profit Pedestrian Wanderlust and my good friend Larry Keigwin recommended Nicole. Nicole needed some promotional material for a series of classes she was teaching and so I offered to collaborate with her on making a dance video portrait similar to the rest of our series. As with all of our films, I let her choose the location that spoke to her for an improvisation and she chose Washington Square Park. The idea was simple and followed the theme of all Pedestrian Wanderlust video portraits; we would arrive at the space, map out a loose trajectory, then embark on an improvisational duet between dancer and videographer. The result was one of the most magical and interactive Pedestrian Wanderlust films to date.



Nicole Wolcott engages girls in fountain to dance with her in Pedestrian Wanderlust's Nicole in Washington Square Park

SE: *Tell us a little about your history and background with dance and/or film, and which medium*

you are most involved in:

RS: Although I've always been interested in documenting, my career in dance film specifically began rather spontaneously with the start of the Pedestrian Wanderlust movement. The project began on an impulse to film a friend improvising in the street with my iPhone and since then has evolved into a series that has featured over 400 dancers improvising in public spaces all over the world, still shot on an iPhone.

I have always been a dancer though. For as long as I can remember I've had a fascination with the human body and movement. I began my formal training in high school studying hip hop, ballet, jazz, and musical theatre then went on to study for my BFA in dance from Florida State University before moving to NYC and spending my first few years dancing in several dance companies. My background in dance informs my filming style as I move along with the dancer in order to make the viewer feel like they are part of the dance.

SE: *Do you follow Screen Dance as a genre?*

RS: Absolutely. I have always spent countless hours in front of my computer watching and re-watching dance films that inspired me. I would share them with friends, mute the videos and change the music to find new meanings, and sit around dreaming up my own ideas for films.

SE: *Is this your first dance film?*

RS: Certainly not. As previously mentioned this film is part of the dance film video portrait series that is Pedestrian Wanderlust that has featured over 400 dancers improvising in public spaces.



A dancer mid-air during a wedding party photo at Bethesda Fountain

SE: *When you approach a dance film project, do you have a pre-existing idea for a form, or do you let the footage shape the project? How much of your project is shaped in editing?*

RS: I don't have any pre-existing idea or form when approaching a project, which is really quite liberating. Both the videography and the dancing are improvised and so the piece is found in the moment and shaped entirely by the impulsive relationship between dancer and videographer. There isn't much that is done in editing either. Almost all of the films are filmed in one take and kept as one shot with no cuts. To highlight the overall trajectory of the dancers though without exhausting today's audiences with a long run time, I speed up the footage a bit and then also add a yellow filter. Both of these elements have become signatures for Pedestrian Wanderlust films.

SE: *What moves and inspires you most about the intersections of dance and film?*

RS: Live dance is a spectacular thing but the ability to really direct the viewer's eye, create certain illusions, and intricately curate the experience are what really take dance film to a whole new level for me. I also love the documentary aspect of it. There is a famous Merce Cunningham quote in which he says that dance gives nothing back; no manuscripts, no paintings to hang on walls, no scripts to be printed and sold. With dance film, we can change that.

SE: *What kind of audience reactions has your film received?*

RS: This film has been one of our most well received films to date, due in large part to the way

Nicole inspired the group of girls to join her for a dance throughout the fountain at the end. It embodies what Pedestrian Wanderlust is all about which is building a community and inspiring people to move.

Bethesda Fountain Group Shoot

SE: *How did you come to make this film? What were the inspirations for, and/or ideas behind it?*

RS: I was inspired to make a dance film with a bunch of dancers at Bethesda Fountain nearly a year and a half before it happened. I was there one day and could see very clearly all of the different options for how the camera and dancers could navigate the space. The architecture there is simply incredible. To find my dancers, I created an event and posted about the opportunity to make a dance film all over facebook. Many of the dancers who showed up that day had previously worked on other Pedestrian Wanderlust video portraits of their own but certainly not all of them. It was exciting not knowing who I would get or how many dancers it would be until the day of. This is a video portrait series that celebrates improvisation from both the dancers and the videographer. To be honest, I was hoping for a larger turnout and probably would have had it if we stuck with our original date for the event but we were rained out and unfortunately had to reschedule. My original vision for this was to have 50+ dancers all weaving and dancing throughout the space. We made do with what we had on our makeup day though by reusing the dancers and having them run to be in other parts of the video after their first appearance. Overall, I'm still very pleased with how it turned out.



Chris Makens dances at Bethesda Fountain

SE: *What kind of audience reactions has your film received?*

RS: Audiences have really loved this film and it has been very well received. It received 1st Place in the Audience Awards for the Danceador Lose Yourself to Dance Film Contest with over 900 votes. We are honored to have it been recognized in the Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival for Best Interface with Camera as well.



Two dancers pull the camera with them at Bethesda Fountain

SE: *What are your plans for festivals and/or distribution with these films?*

RS: I plan to submit both these films to applicable festivals as I find them. In the meantime, each film is live for viewing on our website www.pedestrianwanderlust.com under the full videos tab with all of our other video portraits. It's also on our youtube channel www.youtube.com/c/pedestrianwanderlust, and clips can be found on our instagram @pedestrianwanderlust.

SE: *Is there anything else you would like to share?*

RS: Pedestrian Wanderlust is **#AMovementMovement** of improvised dance in public spaces aimed at celebrating freedom of expression and a diversity of people, places and creative movement. What started as a casual **video portrait series** of New York City dancers has grown

into a global movement based community. We have currently filmed over 400 video portraits with dancers from all over the world in locations such as New York, Los Angeles, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Spain (two more locations added: Miami and Puerto Rico!). We also bring together dancers and live musicians to host **public improv jams and free public dance classes**. We are committed to expanding and showcasing this international community that shares in the joy of dancing outside.

We are thrilled to have just recently launched our crowd-funding platform on Patreon at www.patreon.com/pedestrianwanderlust in order to allow audiences to support us in growing and expanding upon this movement.

ScreenDance Diaries and **Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival** wish **Pedestrian Wanderlust** much continued success!

Enjoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T78-T5gSVfU&feature=youtu.be>

https://youtu.be/pBi2IVe_F5w

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