Inspired by Maurice Sendak's classic children's novel *Where the Wild Things Are*, *WILD* follows the journey of several young men as they struggle to break free from the systemic injustices that permeate Black and Brown communities. Transforming the young men's personal stories into an artistic dance work intended to be a reclaiming of time, unity, space, and Black culture, *WILD* has been co-commissioned by; Open Society Foundations, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, CUNY Dance Initiative and the Gerald W. Lynch Theater at John Jay College, with additional support from New Music USA, Dance/NYC’s Coronavirus Dance Relief Fund & Dance Advancement Fund, and The Black Iris Project’s generous seed planters. Using physical movement to illustrate and honor the history of Black bodies moving through space while encountering oppression, this cutting-edge contemporary ballet incorporates poetry, reflective journal entries, visual art, and original music by an array of millennial artistic voices.

**What It Means to Break Free: A Tale of Detention, Told in Dance**

The choreographer Jeremy McQueen’s film “Wild: Act 1” seeks to give voice to young men caught in the criminal justice system.

March 16, 2021 By Brian Seibert

https://nyti.ms/3d988uo
Founded by choreographer Jeremy McQueen in 2016, The Black Iris Project (BIP) is a ballet collaborative and education vehicle which creates new, relevant classical and contemporary ballet works that celebrate diversity and Black history. Based in New York City, BIP hosts a team of predominantly artists of color, and delivers cross-disciplinary and original works. Championing individuality, the collaborative harnesses the Black inherent creative spirit. The ballets that McQueen choreographs for BIP are rooted in Black history and community, bringing inadequately-represented stories to public attention through an art form that has only recently begun to expand meaningfully outside its privileged past. His works push the boundaries of the ballet world as they highlight the personal narratives of significant Black public figures as well as extraordinary individuals amongst the general public who navigate a world that is prejudiced and dangerous for them. BIP's vision is to encourage and inspire youth of color to pursue art, movement, and music as an expressive outlet and means for collective healing, as well as educating audiences about how Black history relates to the modern Black journey. BIP has performed for audiences around the country and has been featured in numerous publications including The New York Times, Elle Magazine, Village Voice, Out Magazine, Huffington Post, The Root, and received a 2020 New York Emmy® Award-nomination for its first dance film, "A Mother’s Rite".

"On a daily basis, we casually cage Black and Brown children in adult prisons without a second thought. Jeremy McQueen has captured the inhumanity of that policy choice through a series of dance performances that will take your breath away. Anyone who advocates for justice reform -- or who believes that justice should not be distorted by racism -- needs to see and experience these performances. They will remind you that we need to use every avenue to push for change."

Kim Taylor-Thompson, Board Chair, Equal Justice Initiative

Jeremy McQueen is an Emmy® Award-nominated choreographer & director, dedicated to story-telling rooted in experience and social engagement. His work aims to create spaces of comfort, solace, and connection through reflection—a sharing of observations of what is going on around him. Born and raised in San Diego, California, McQueen is a graduate of The Ailey School/ Fordham University, B.F.A. in dance program and has performed in Broadway’s Wicked, The Color Purple, Radio City Christmas Spectacular, and numerous Metropolitan Opera productions. McQueen is a 2020 recipient of the Soros Justice Fellowship from Open Society Foundations, 2019 recipient of the Bronx Council of the Arts’ BRIO (Bronx Recognizes Its Own) Award, 2013 recipient of the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago’s Choreographers of Color Award [Winning Works], and a two-time finalist of the Capezio Award for Choreographic Excellence.

To make a tax deductible donation, visit www.blackirisproject.org/support

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As a man that spent 6 years in the California Department of Corrections as an inmate and now a nearly 20 years as a theater professional I have been very critical of how prison life and the effects of that life on family members of the incarcerated is portrayed in all forms of media an entertainment. Wild stands out as an outstanding and compelling piece. The choreography and performances more than capture the raw emotions dealing with incarcerated life that are sometimes indescribable with words or not able to be captured on film or stage. With every movement, I was nodding to myself in agreement with what was being conveyed. I look forward to seeing this again and subsequent works from Jeremy McQueen and The Black Iris Project.”

Ahmed Kenyatta Dents
Development & Artistic Associate, San Diego Repertory Theatre

“WILD is an incredible visual interpretation of the struggle youth in custody face as they attempt to define their own identities. It can be hard, as a practitioner, to define and explain the realities of our current system, but this film offers imagery to a movement to stop incarcerating youth.”

Candice C. Jones
President & CEO, Public Welfare Foundation

“I was deeply touched when I saw the latest work WILD from choreographer Jeremy McQueen. Having followed and supported Jeremy’s career this choreography and film is one the most challenging and impactful work I have seen in a long time. Through dance and film Jeremy is lifting the voices of incarcerated Black and Brown youth and they shall not be silenced any longer. Those of us watching this film can no longer stay on the sidelines. WILD is also a call to action.”

Ben Rodriguez-Cubenas
Rockefeller Brothers Fund

“WILD is a raw depiction of the world behind the dark walls of the juvenile justice system. McQueen’s artistic approach bravely exposes the traumatic victimization of physical and mental abuse on incarcerated juveniles. The Wild delivers a powerful message that creates awareness and challenges our punitive "injustice" system's broken narrative.”

Marla Navarrete
Educator and Life Coach for formerly incarcerated youth
“Jeremy McQueen’s WILD is a must watch for anyone committed to equity, freedom, and healing. This is not merely a film stating, “look at the injustices behind bars.” WILD dives much deeper, connecting the audience to the process of one going mad while incarcerated, how one escape’s their physical reality in order to survive, and how things actually “worsen” inside in a myriad of ways and does the complete opposite of rehabilitation, which is the illusion our prison system seeks to maintain. McQueen, exposes how one’s captivity impacts the social-emotional and physical well-being of more than that individual - the family, friends, community, self, the guards, the whole system. While this is an intense and graphic ballet, it does not leave the audience full of rage, hate, and defeat, which can happen with social justice performance art.

Watching WILD is healing in itself. There is a resonance that rids the feeling of isolation for anyone who has been justice involved, a knowing that systemic change is no longer just a wish, but is happening, and an undoing of the knotted complexities of modern day slavery. McQueen's WILD gives life, ignites social change, transforms the meaning of ballet and performance art, and is a revolutionary historic film that will become a canonical text across genres - prison studies, ethnic studies, ballet, dance, art, social justice activism, history, and more.

This is the first ballet to truly grapple with the ways we internalize systems of incarceration, dominance, and hierarchy.”

Xtina Geri
Inner Healing Coach & Abolition Activist

“In these decades of work and the sameness of cells, there is much to be learned by the repetition of architecture and repetition of hopelessness. In WILD, McQueen takes my modest efforts and makes these kids come alive with hope and passion and grace. I wish all the kids I have worked with could see this film and see their pain is understood and they are respected.”

Richard Ross
Photographer, Juvenile in Justice

“WILD Is such an amazing affirmation of the resiliency of Black young men despite the oppression and harm our systems inflict. It’s a voice that cries to be heard and Wild gives voice to their power. Beautiful and haunting. A reminder that we must do better.”

Gladys Carrión
Former New York State Commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).