Utilizing the poetics of longing and erosion, Birdsong is a multimedia performance work which considers the repetition and reverberation of trauma and the ways that grief and resignation vibrate within us. Working with a variety of materials including clay, water, dirt, an industrial fan, and a multi-generational cast captured on film across several seasons in Prospect Park, this workshop presentation will explore the scaffolding of the work. After generating material and building performances in CPR's spaces for nearly a decade, including as an Artist-in-Residence in 2015 and 2016, this performance is a record of Emily Wexler's process in and with CPR, and offers a space for reflection, feedback, and public engagement.

Choreography, Performance, and Film by Emily Wexler
Sound by Sufjan Stevens and Rihanna
Costume by Lily Shell
Clay Pot by Jena Gilbert-Merrill

Film appearances by Chip Alexandria, Canyon Carroll, Courtney Cooke, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Niall Jones, Rachel Orji, Rebecca Pantano, Arabia Richardson, Song Tucker, and Emily Wexler

Special thanks from Emily to Alex Rosenberg, Anna Muselmann, CPR, The Wexlers, Kate Logan, Laura Gilbert, Jodi Bender, Cast of LOVESONG (film), Kim Brandt, Lily Shell, Jena Gilbert-Merrill, and Ellie Black.

Support for Birdsong comes from the University of the Arts 2023 Presidential Grant for Creative Research and Innovation.

BIOGRAPHIES

Emily Wexler is a Bessie-nominated choreographer and dancer living in Brooklyn. Her work has been seen in a variety of settings from MoMA PS1 to the cafeterias of Senior Citizen Centers. As a performer she works primarily with Kim Brandt, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Yvonne Meier, and Ryan McNamara. She has a longstanding collaborative relationship in her work with dancer Courtney Cooke. She is on faculty at the University of The Arts and the School of Visual Arts. She has a B.A. and M.F.A in dance from Hollins University.

Niall Jones is a dance artist working and living in New York City. Niall uses light, sound, video, text, costume and other temporal elements to construct situations that engage and explore the conditions of site, presence, arrangement, and disorientation in performance.

Chip Alexandria is a Philadelphia-based dance artist. She received her dance education in Austin, TX from ages 11-18 and later earned her BFA in dance from the University of the Arts under the direction of Donna Faye Burchfield. Over the years she has performed in works by Emily Wexler, Sidra Bell, Katie Swords-Thurman, Mark Caserta, Lily Mello, Kali Petrizzo, Tommie-Waheed Evans, and Doug Varone, among others. Chip is a member of BigKid dance under the direction of Mark Caserta, as well as a member of Sheer Spectacle under the direction of Lily Mello and Kali Petrizzo. This is her second project with Emily Wexler.

Ishmael Houston-Jones is a choreographer, author, performer, teacher, and curator. His improvised dance and text work has been performed world-wide. He has received three New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Awards for collaborations with writer Dennis Cooper, choreographers Miguel Gutierrez and Fred Holland and composers Chris Cochrane and Nick Hallett, and a fourth “Bessie” for contributions to the field of dance. Houston-Jones curated Platform 2012: Parallels which concentrated on choreographers from the African diaspora and postmodernism and co-curated with Will Rawls Platform 2016: Lost & Found, Dance, New York, HIV/AIDS, Then and Now. As an author Houston-Jones’ essays, fiction, interviews, and performance texts have been published in several anthologies. His first book, FAT and other stories, was published in June 2018 by Yonkers International Press. Houston-Jones is a 2022 recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship. His work has been supported by The Herb Alpert Foundation, The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, The Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.

Arabia Richardson is an Artist, Collaborator, Dancivist, and Educator born and raised in Dayton, OH currently based in Philadelphia. Arabia received a MFA in dance in 2022 and graduated Cum Laude in 2019 with a BFA in dance from the University of the Arts (UArts). Currently Arabia is an Adjunct Professor at Temple University and UArts. She was recently selected to receive her first grant for Creative Research & Innovation.

Courtney Cooke is a dancer and teacher in Brooklyn, NY. She has been dancing with Emily Wexler for over a decade.

Jena Gilbert-Merrill is a ceramic artist and craft advocate based in Western North Carolina. She received a B.A. in Art and Education from Swarthmore College in 2016, completed a special student program in Ceramics at the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2017, and in 2022 finished an M.A. from the University of Delaware-Winterthur Program in American Material Culture. She currently works in development at the Center for Craft in Asheville. Jena’s work as a maker, educator, and scholar is driven by an interest in the empathy embedded in objects and materials. She is
obsessed with process and, as a result, is in constant motion.

Rachel Orji is a dancer, photographer, choreographer, writer, and multimedia artist investigating how music enlivens physical and digital spaces. Rachel is trained in modern dance techniques such as Horton, Cunningham, and Graham alongside over a decade of ballet and contemporary dance training. She will graduate in May 2023 with a BFA in dance with a photography minor from the University of the Arts under the direction of Donna Faye Burchfield.

Rebecca Pantano is a Philadelphia-based dancer, performer, teacher, and choreographer. Raised in Allentown, PA, Rebecca started dancing at the age of 3. She received her BFA in dance at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, under the direction of Donna Faye Burchfield. Since attending the University of the Arts, Rebecca has had the opportunity to work with artists such as Sidra Bell, Jesse Zaritt, Katie Swords Thurman, Emily Wexler, Sara Shelton Mann, Tommie-Waheed Evans, and Shayla-Vie Jenkins.

Philadelphia-based queer artist, Canyon Carroll was born in Roanoke, VA. Canyon was awarded their BFA in performance arts in the spring of 2022 at the University of the Arts under the direction of Donna Faye Burchfield. During their time as a student, they had the opportunity to work with and perform works by Robert Battle, Annie Rigney, Sidra Bell, Doug Verone, and other world-renowned artists and faculty. Following graduation, Canyon was invited to the Centre of National Danse in Paris, France to perform and collaborate a work under the direction of Niall Jones, most recently joined Gallim Dance Company in Brooklyn, under the direction of Andrea Miller, and Sheer Spectacle, under the direction of Lily Mello and Kali Petrizzo.

Lily Shell is a costume designer and doctoral student in Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where her research focuses on the role of the audience in contemporary Black theatre in the United States. Recent design credits include Criminal (Teatro Décimo Piso) and Soundview (Emily Wexler). She is an alumna of Vassar College and the Professional Apprentice Program in Costumes at the Juilliard School. She loves reality TV, Harry Styles, and the ocean.

Song Aziza Tucker (she/her) is a project based movement and writing artist whose works have spiraled out of her love for Black Femmes, music, and poetry. Her latest choreographic work After the Flood spirals out of the intimate and elaborate research study of the relational, trivial, and healing properties of hip hop music and its entanglement with Black femme existence in the United States. Song is wrapped up in the erotic, cathartic, horrific, and beautiful reflections of the ways Black femmes survive and pronounce imminent aliveness for themselves. This is lifelong. Alongside her research, Song has had the pleasure of working as a performer and collaborator with Mark Caserta, Tommie-Waheed Evans, Shayla-Vie Jenkins, Jordan Lloyd, Niall Jones, Doug Varone, Jesse Zarritt, and Abby Zbikowski, among others. She is an active performing collaborator with Waheedworks and Sheer Spectacle. Through all collaboration, Song desires and commands a full pronouncement of a voluminous self impelled by Black femme strategies in research and lived practice.

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Dylan Phillips
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UP NEXT AT CPR
Thurs, May 18 at 7:30 P.M.
Open Studios: Bryanna Bradley, Jordan Deal, BriFreí, and Nazareth Hassan with Sierra D. Leverett, curated by Malcolm-x Betts

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