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CounterPULSE Announces Resident Artists for 2009 Performing Diaspora Program

San Francisco-- From Kathak to Flamenco and from Tabla to Taiko, California is home to many diverse and talented practitioners of traditional performance. Despite this abundance, few opportunities exist for artists who wish to challenge, expand or experiment with their own traditional art forms. CounterPULSE's Performing Diaspora is a festival, residency program, commissioning program, and symposium featuring dance, music, theater, media and interdisciplinary artists who are using traditional forms as a basis for experimentation and innovation.

This week CounterPULSE announces the 2009 Performing Diaspora Resident Artists. Selected from a pool of over 60 applicants from across California, these thirteen artists and companies represent many of the state's most exciting new voices at the intersection of traditional arts, contemporary performance and California's changing demographics. According to Jessica Robinson, Director of CounterPULSE and founder of Performing Diaspora, "We were blown away by the overwhelmingly positive response we received, and by the quality and range of the applicants—it underlined the need for this program as traditional artists are pushing boundaries like never before. The performances developed at CounterPULSE will range from hip-hop-inspired Filipino folk dance to Greek rembetiko music with shadow puppets, to a political take on Nautanki a North Indian folk theater tradition. These aren't museum pieces—this is living, breathing work and it will certainly challenge our concepts of tradition and innovation."

The artists were selected by Sherwood Chen of the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, Laura Elaine Ellis of the African and African American Performing Arts Coalition, and Debra Smith of the Arab Cultural and Community Center. This team was chosen by Robinson to provide expert guidance throughout the application process, select the artists, and craft the content for the symposia and discussions.

The artists will be in residence from June through October, developing new work at CounterPULSE and in their home communities. A series of public work-in-progress showings, discussions, and symposia will culminate in the Performing Diaspora Festival, November 5-22, 2009. Several of the artists will be commissioned to create full-length works as part of CounterPULSE's 2010-2011 season. The artists range from San Francisco to Fresno to Long Beach, and over half hail from outside the Bay Area.

According to Robinson, "Hosting a statewide residency program provides CounterPULSE with new challenges, but also huge opportunities. Our artists will engage with their local communities as they develop their work, while they'll also be getting feedback from each other and presenting their work online. Our website will host videos, photos, interviews, artists' journals and lively discussions. We see this program as a model for a new kind of residency program, and a new way to create an artistic community. We hope that audiences throughout the state will engage with these artists—we'll all have the chance to really understand the art and its context at a deep level."

About the Artists:

Opal Palmer Adisa

Oakland, CA

Opal Palmer Adisa refers to herself as Ja-American and is deeply rooted in Jamaican and American cultures. As a writer of all genres, a college professor, photographer and performer, Adisa is concerned about African cultural preservation in the Diaspora, and particularly in the Caribbean region. Her works examine and explore healing from varied perspectives. The work that she will present, *The Myalist*, explores healing the self and the world through language, song and dance. Adisa sees the myalist as the contemporary griot --historian and storyteller-- and it is through her stories, which are her medicine, that she is able to heal herself and those she encounters.

Yannis Adoniou, Artistic Director of KUNST-STOFF

San Francisco, CA

Yannis Adoniou, the Artistic Director of KUNST-STOFF, has become known for his unusual and highly visual theatrical dance works, which merge different art forms, often creating unexpected collisions and provocative beauty. His next artistic project will explore the origins and evolution of Rembetiko in a collaboration with singer Catherine Clambaneva, and shadow theater artist Leonidas Kassapides. Rembetiko music — similar to that of the tango, flamenco, the blues, and Fado — was born out of sorrow, pain, desire, and yearnings, specifically those of Turkish Greek refugees seeking to adjust to a new life in a new country, far from home.

Ana Maria Alvarez, Artistic Director of CONTRA-TIEMPO

Los Angeles, CA

Ana Maria Alvarez, a Cuban American choreographer engages, creates opportunities for people to feel, relate and communicate with each other and with the subject material that she addresses in her work: immigration, race, gender and power. Her work challenges notions of how Salsa has been utilized to depoliticize Latinos, females and communities of color - and how it can be reclaimed and used as a tool to say something meaningful - and be heard! CONTRA-TIEMPO will be debuting the opening suite of the new urban-Latin dance theater work *Pa' comen(zar)*. Food is often used as a metaphor for dance, music, body parts, relationships, joy, ecstasy, hurt, and anger. CONTRA-TIEMPO will explore the interchange and conversation between dance and food, the fundamental voids in our cultural and societal relationship with our own history and our connection to ourselves and each other.

Dulce Capadocia, Artistic Director of Silayan Philippine-American Dance Company

Los Angeles, CA

Dulce Capadocia is well-known as an award-winning Artistic Director and storyteller uniquely trained in both contemporary dance and Philippine folk traditions. Her choreography is a theatrical interpretation of her heritage as a Filipina growing up in Los Angeles' inner city. Capadocia and her critically-acclaimed multi-ethnic Silayan Dance Company will premiere an exciting original dance drama. Taking inspiration from urban sources and her experience being raised in a home where dance and culture flourished, Capadocia's newest creation examines the cultural phenomenon of the "Hip Hop Tinikling" and promises to be a dramatic, thought-provoking dance theatre expression of the Filipino-American experience.

Colette Eloi, Artistic Director of El Wah Movement

Oakland, CA

Colette Eloi is an artist and student of the diverse dance styles of the African Diaspora along with Ballet and Modern. Her emphasis is on Haiti, the native land of her parents. As a dancer/choreographer Eloi has performed extensively, both nationally and internationally. She is Artistic Director of El Wah Movement, which presents Haitian dance, along with African Diaspora Dance. Her new work will use the folkloric dances of Haiti to address some of the country's issues in association with the western world. Eloi will offer social commentary about the politics of poverty through both traditional and contemporized Haitian dance, as well as sound and projected visuals.

Danica Sena Gakovich

San Francisco, CA

Danica Sena Gakovich is an experienced choreographer, performer, musician and teacher who has performed and researched folkloric music and dance traditions from Spain for over 20 years. Her works are exploratory and collaborative while maintaining deep musical/rhythmic awareness. Danica will be creating a work that explores the shared ancestry between traditional Serbian and Flamenco music. *Koreni*, which means "roots" in Serbian is an original work based on profound investigation of the shared ancestry between traditional Serbian and Flamenco music. San Francisco-based flamenco choreographer/performer Sena re-connects with her Serbian heritage together with an exceptional cast of world-reknown musicians Miroslav Tadic (guitar), Rade Serbedzija (singer, actor), Alfredo Caceres (guitar) and Juan Carlos Moreno (singer).

Charlotte Moraga

San Francisco, CA

Charlotte Moraga, a senior disciple of Pandit Chitresh Das, performs traditional Kathak dance around the world as principal dancer of Chitresh Das Dance Company (CDDC), and as a solo artist. Moraga is currently director of the Chhandam Youth Dance Company. She is a recipient of the first Shenson Performing Arts Fellowship, recognizing artistic merit and potential for future excellence and impact on the field of Kathak. With her newest work, Moraga will explore the triangle of audience, dancer and musicians by putting it into a triptych based on the Hindu paradigm of existence: creation, preservation and destruction. Destruction is often seen as a creative act in itself as it makes way for rejuvenation. The work will feature collaborative and virtuosic live music.

Prumsodun Ok

Long Beach, CA

Prumsodun Ok is an artist and cultural activist based in Long Beach, California where he teaches filmmaking to inner-city youth with the YMCA Youth Institute, is a videographer for the Cambodian Community History and Archiving Project, and teaches classical Cambodian dance at the Khmer Arts Academy, as well as serving as its curator and media designer. Ok draws upon beliefs of reincarnation and the ritualistic, meditative language of Cambodian classical dance to illustrate a relationship transcendent of form and image, gender and sexuality, to say clearly: "Let love live."

Gema Sandoval, Artistic Director of Danza Floricanto/USA

Pasadena, CA

Gema Sandoval is the founder and Artistic Director of Danza Floricanto/USA. Gema is devoted to illuminating her Mexican-American heritage through dance. She and her company have recreated the movement, costume and song of 17 different regions of Mexico, and over half a dozen works on

the Chicano experience which celebrate cultural identity for the Mexican American community and the immigrant experience for the rest of America. Sandoval will develop *Reflections/Reflecciones*, a dance work based on Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me Ultima*, a piece that blends the vocabulary of traditional Mexican and Indigenous folk dance, African influenced and European based contemporary expressions.

Devendra Sharma

Fresno, CA

Devendra Sharma is a performer, writer, and director of Nautanki, Raaslila, Bhagat, and Rasiya, the traditional musical theatre genres of northern India. He was trained in the famous Swami-Khera Gharana by renowned folk guru Pundit Ram Dayal Sharma. He has given more than five hundred performances to date and directed many films illustrating Indian folk traditions. At present, he is an Assistant Professor of Communication at California State University, Fresno. Sharma's artistic mission is to use the indigenous performing arts to bring critical attention to contemporary global issues and empower marginalized people. His current Nautanki piece examines the phenomenon of Indian men who come to America from India to study or work and have two romantic partners, one in India and another in America.

Sri Susilowati

Pasadena, CA

Sri Susilowati is a choreographer originally from Java, Indonesia. Her work is grounded in Indonesian art forms as well as training in post-modern dance composition. She creates contemporary works on the subjects of community, gender, and ethnicity through dance and multi-media. *Eating Dance* (working title) employs contemporary dance and spoken word, along with traditional classical Balinese, Javanese, and Sundanese movement vocabularies to tell stories of food ritual for dancers. Using text, video projection, and dance movements, the piece will explore the contrast of how dancers in the United States and Indonesia value food.

Wang Fei, Artistic Director of the North American Guqin Association

Union City, CA

Wang Fei is an internationally known guqin performer, educator, and scholar. She is considered one of the most experienced guqin artists of her generation. She is the founder and director of the North American Guqin Association and a council member of the China Guqin committee. Wang has experience internationally giving concert-level performances and presentations on the guqin and related arts to both Chinese and Western audiences. She has won several awards in the field of Chinese music and lectured at many universities. Wang and her collaborators will create a multidisciplinary project titled *The Living Art of the Guqin: Beyond a Museum Piece*. This project will feature traditional and contemporary instruments, digital projections and imagery and performance. The goal is to take the audience on a journey that will deliver this ancient art form into the new digital era of 21st century China.

Adia Tamar Whitaker

San Francisco, CA

Adia Tamar Whitaker is one of the youngest professional choreographers and master teachers of Afro-Haitian folkloric dance in the United States. A former member of Blanche Brown's Group Petit La Croix and Colette Eloi's Reconnect, she has studied and performed Afro-Haitian dance in the U.S. and abroad for 13 years. Her artistic work focuses on neo-folklore of the African Diaspora, linking contemporary modern dance, original vernacular movement, and traditional dance theater.

Recently Whitaker completed the first part of a Jerome Foundation Travel and Study grant in Ghana. Her new project combines dance, media and music inspired by "Ampey," a rhythmic game played by little girls in Ghana.

About the Curators:

Sherwood Chen

Sherwood Chen is Associate Director of the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA), and has worked in festival production, youth arts programming, arts grantmaking, and community arts, working for organizations including the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, The San Francisco Foundation and the Music Center Education Division. As a performer, Chen has worked with artists including Grisha Coleman/Echo::System, Anna Halprin, inkBoat/Shinichi Iova-Koga, Amara Tabor-Smith, Oguri, Do Hee Lee, and Sara Shelton Mann. He was a resident member of Min Tanaka's performance collective Maijuku in rural Japa. Chen leads Body Weather Laboratory movement research training originally developed by Tanaka. He currently serves as a member of the City of Oakland Cultural Funding Advisory Committee, and as a board member of Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco, and Khmer Arts Academy in Long Beach / Phnom Penh.

Laura Elaine Ellis

Laura Elaine Ellis is a dancer, choreographer and producer. Presently, she is Executive Director of the African and African American Performing Arts Coalition (AAAPAC) - a San Francisco based, non-profit organization, founded in 1995 by a collective of artists looking to create better performance opportunities for and produce shows that reflect the aesthetic and cultural representation of Africans and African Americans. As AAAPAC's executive director, Laura Elaine Ellis has co-produced successful events such as the *Labor of Love Dance Series*, *The Quilt Project: Pieces of Me*, and currently *the Black Choreographers Festival: Here & Now*. *The Black Choreographers Festival: Here & Now* is a community event of dance concerts, symposia, mentoring programs and workshops celebrating the legacy and artistry of African and African American choreographers. Funding awards for AAAPAC projects include: The Creative Work Fund, The Irvine Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, The San Francisco Foundation, the Walter & Elise Haas Fund and the Zellerbach Family Foundation.

Debbie Smith

Debbie Smith, Cultural Program Coordinator for San Francisco's Arab Cultural and Community Center, has a Bachelor of Arts in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. From 2001 to 2007, Debbie worked for Dance Brigade's Dance Mission Theater, a multicultural dance school and theater in San Francisco's Mission district where she oversaw daily operations of the school and theater, as well as programming the theater's spring and fall seasons and coordinating all aspects of production and publicity, serving dancers, choreographers, technicians and other artists from a wide range of dance styles and backgrounds. Currently she works full time at the Arab Cultural and Community Center on cultural program development, event management, grant writing, and publicity and marketing. She works with Arab and Arab-American performing and visual artists of all genres. An active member of the San Francisco arts community, she has participated in a number of panels and committees relating to dance, arts funding and advocacy, and other related subjects, in addition to both freelance and volunteer stage management, production assistance and consultation for a number of San Francisco artists and venues. She is currently serving her second term as a member of the Isadora Duncan Dance Awards committee. Since 2005 she has been a member of Al-Juthoor Palestinian Folk Dance Company. She continues

to read and study widely in the fields of dance history and ethnology, ethnomusicology, and performance studies.

About CounterPULSE:

CounterPULSE provides space and resources for emerging artists and cultural innovators, serving as an incubator for the creation of socially relevant, community-based art and culture. CounterPULSE acts as a catalyst for art and action; creating a forum for the open exchange of art and ideas, catalyzing transformation in our communities and our society. We work towards a world that celebrates diversity of race, class, cultural heritage, artistic expression, ability, gender identity & sexual orientation. We strive to create an environment that is physically and economically accessible to everyone.

Important Dates:

Performing Diaspora Public Work-in-Progress Showings

Saturday, 8/29: 11am-2pm

Saturday, 8/29: 2:30-5:30pm

Sunday, 8/30: 12-3pm

Sunday, 10/18: 11am-2pm

Saturday, 10/24: 11am-2pm

Saturday, 10/24: 2:30-5:30pm

Performing Diaspora Symposium

November 7, 10am-5pm

Performing Diaspora Festival

Thursdays-Sundays

November 5-8, 12-15, and 19-22, 2009

The Performing Diaspora Program is made possible by support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Columbia Foundation, the James C. Irvine Foundation, the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, the Ken Hempel Fund for the Arts, San Francisco Grants for the Arts, the San Francisco Foundation and the members and supporters of CounterPULSE.

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