

Kiana Pilson

Miller Arts Dance Scholar

Rising Fourth Year Award Outcome Report

Commissioning Helen Simoneau Danse and Developing My Dance Portfolio

Thank you to the J. Sanford Miller Family and the Miller Arts Faculty Advisory Committee for the opportunity to pursue this project. I am extremely grateful to be supported in my artistic passions, especially in this time where many artists do not have the same opportunity. I would also like to thank Kim Brooks Mata, the Head and Artistic director of UVA's Dance Program, for advising me throughout this process. I chose Director Mata to be my faculty mentor, because she has always been a positive resource in my time with UVA's Dance Program. I knew her thoughtfulness and dedication in her own work would be helpful as I engaged in this project.

My original proposal was to study with the American Dance Festival (ADF) in New York City. However, I had to shift my plans after the cancellation of this program due to COVID-19 safety measures. Zohar (Zoe) Ziff, another Miller Arts Scholar in the dance discipline, also applied to ADF's program. With our shared need to restructure our projects, Zoe and I decided to combine a portion of our funding and pursue a more collaborative process. We commissioned Helen Simoneau, the artistic director of [Helen Simoneau Danse](#), to choreograph a duet for us. This duet's final form will manifest as a dance film, which will be presented at the UVA Dance Program's 2021 virtual spring dance concert.

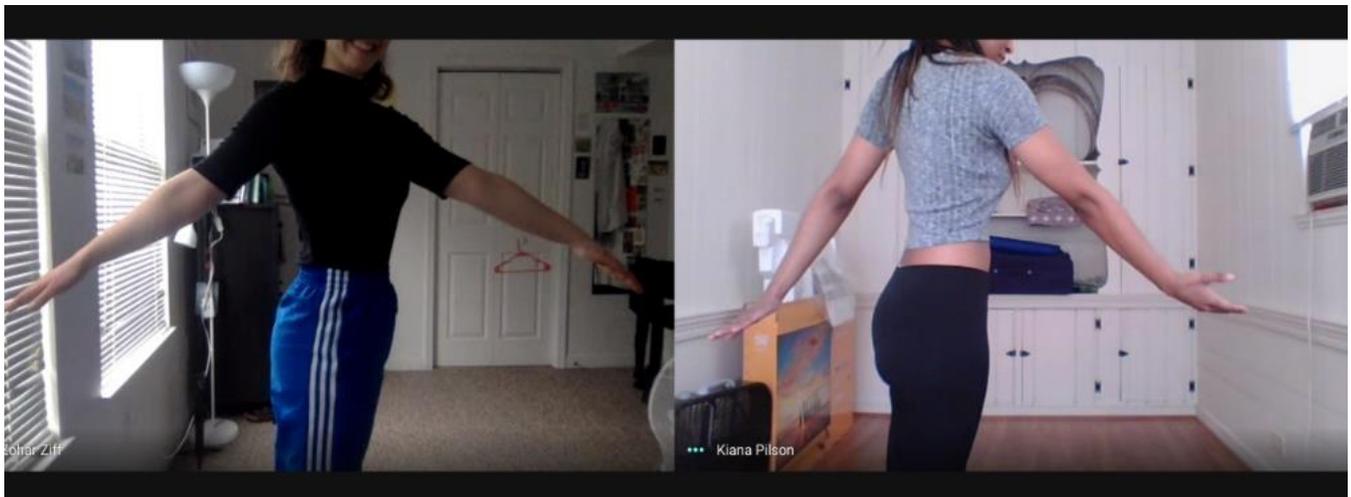
The process of learning and solidifying the choreography was primarily virtual, as our rehearsals took place on a video-chat platform. Zoe and I often attended these rehearsals from our own homes in Charlottesville, as it was not always safe to rehearse in the same space. Throughout the process we had to be very willing to adapt as restrictions and knowledge about the pandemic were consistently changing. While this could be difficult, the process helped me to step outside of my comfort zone, to explore new approaches to movement, and to experience partnering in a way I never had before in dance.

The unique format of this project also allowed me to experience new freedoms in the creative process. For instance, Zoe and I were able to choose the locations we wanted the piece to be recorded in. We were able to consider what we wanted the dance to "say," how the viewer's interpretation of the film's meaning would be impacted by its location, and how the movement quality of the dance changed when we performed in a different location than the one we learned it in. We also considered practical questions such as the texture of the environment (e.g. the difference between dancing on concrete and dancing on grass), as well as what costume choices would best fit the piece and the location(s) we chose. This was another way the project has broadened my exploration in dance, as I have not had much prior experience creating dance film.

In addition to the duet I have worked on with Zoe, my adapted project includes various means to develop my portfolio. Funding not used to cover the expenses of the duet (i.e. commission

fee, composer's fee, costuming) has been allocated towards dance classes, professional dance photography, and other opportunities to help prepare me for future projects as I transition from undergrad into the workforce.

Rehearsal Images



Images From Location Scouting

Forest Hills Park



IX Art Park

