

Libbie Ryan
Arts Award Outcome Award
Professor Michael Rasbury
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Virtual Intensive with slowdanger

Originally, I intended to use my Arts Award to attend a winter dance intensive in NYC. However, like many things in the past year, I ended up changing plans due to the unforeseen longevity of COVID-19. Thankfully my mentor, Katie Schetlick, helped me and fellow Miller Arts Scholar, Katie Yared, curate our own virtual intensive. As the need for social distancing has severely limited safe access to dance spaces and classes, I aimed to use this project to reconnect to my movement. When our intensive began in January, I had not been in a dance studio in nearly a year. I danced intermittently throughout COVID but was largely inactive. I wish I could say the struggle of the pandemic strengthened my connection to my art, but in reality, I was frustrated by the limitations and solitude of virtual dancing. The lack of dance in my life, and the sedentary lifestyle that came with virtual learning, left me feeling extremely disembodied by the time of our intensive. I cannot emphasize enough how grateful I was, and am, for the opportunity to dance in a studio, with my peer, and take classes with incredible artists.

To avoid the risks of traveling, we rented studio space in Charlottesville. Throughout the week we collaborated with slowdanger, a dance and multidisciplinary performance duo based in Pittsburgh. Throughout the week they led us through different movement practices, guided improvisations, and introduced us to their work in sound and dance. On our first day, they guided us through their Slowdanger Physical Integration, an explorational movement practice accompanied by a sound score. Slowdanger's work draws from their experiences in improvisation, theatre, mime, and other corporeal forms. Throughout this practice, we explored different ways of body connectivity by responding to prompts of imagery and sound. I played with the idea of my arms being one long rope, connected from one middle finger to the other, to help connect my arms to my backspace. Slowdanger also suggested imagining the pelvis as a bowl of liquid, or the head as suspended in a hoop, to explore our range of motion. This practice set up for themes we would explore throughout the week.

While continuing the theme of body connectivity, slowdanger also challenged us to explore different qualities of movement. Imagining my body as moving through a liquid, or even as the liquid itself, could completely change how I moved. Experimenting with the feeling of viscosity or density could develop this mindset even further. I also played with themes of effort and exertion, in which I discovered how I move differently, and sometimes more efficiently, when I am tired or worn out. As I mentioned, slowdanger does a lot of work experimenting with sound and movement. Often times they composed the sound live as Katie and I moved, such that the movement and sound influenced each other. Generally, dancing to music has an element of predictability, but working with live sound required more awareness. Slowdanger's soundscapes

created an ambiance that would affect the atmosphere of the room, creating a space unique to the relationship between dance and sound.

The idea of reflection acted as a central theme throughout the week. As Katie and I reflected the sound in our movement, we also explored reflecting each other. Early in the week, slowdanger led us through an Authentic Movement practice, an improvisation practice in which one of us, the witness, observed, while the other, the mover, improvised with their eyes closed. This practice explores the ideas of following impulses and sensation versus perception. This offers an opportunity to express vulnerability while another bears witness. We also practiced mirroring improvisation exercises, literally reflecting each other's movements. By setting our intentions on attending to each other, we grew attuned to each other's impulses, and began to move with each other rather than alongside each other.

In our final two days working with slowdanger, we developed our work into an improvisational score. This score continued our theme of reflection and mirroring. With some set choreography, sections of the score focused on reacting to each other, the music, and different ways of initiating movement. We also incorporated parts where we sensed each other to know when to start and stop, without the help of the music or cues. Similar to earlier in the week, slowdanger composed the sound for our score as we danced. This score acted as a culmination of our discoveries during the intensive. Going forward, Katie and I are developing the score into a short dance film to be shown at the Spring Student Dance Concert.

During our intensive, Katie and I were also able to attend an aerial silks class at Phoenix Dance Studio, a form that was new and exciting for both of us. We attended a master class with Jasmine Hearn, an artist from New York. Jasmine led us through various improvisational practices, focusing on staying aware and drawing from personal experiences. We also played with qualities like floating or sinking. This continued on themes we developed with slowdanger. All of these practices directly relate to my current class at UVA, Laban and Bartiniéff Movement Systems, which often uses improvisation to develop body connectivity and integration.

I am so thankful to the Miller Arts Scholars for providing me with this generous grant. While my original plans to travel and dance in New York did not work out, this experience was much more meaningful to me. Without this funding, dancing in a studio with other artists during COVID-19 would have been largely inaccessible. My Arts Award went directly to paying slowdanger, Jasmine Hearn, Phoenix Dance Studio, Charlottesville Ballroom, and The Dance Spot for instruction and studio space. Funding was also used for other needs, such as purchasing a speaker, costumes, and equipment for filming. I am also extremely grateful to Katie Schetlick, for being so supportive of our project despite the setbacks and last-minute changes. And to slowdanger, for meeting me where I was in my movement practice, and providing such an encouraging and inspiring space to dance.

Photos



Location for our film



Aerial silks class at Phoenix Dance Studio



Rehearsing our score