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Photo: JH Ketris Photography

Celebrating 11 years of Mascher Space Cooperative, an artist run space in Philadelphia

The weird, experimental, and unconventional still has a home in South Kensington.

by Zornitsa Stoyanova

Zornitsa Stoyanova was a member of Mascher Space Cooperative from 2006 to 2010. She continued rehearsing in the space between 2010 and 2016 and in September 2016, re-joined Mascher as Programs Coordinator. She is one of the lead members, along with Christina Gesualdi, Loren Groenendaal and Ben Grinberg, who are instigating and implementing the 2017 change of structure of the cooperative.

What is Mascher Space:

> ***"Mascher Space Co-op** is a home for new dance in Philadelphia. Artist imagined, artist founded, artist shared and run, Mascher provides space that is affordable and versatile. We are a community of support that cultivates a flow of ideas and modes of deep problem solving and inquiry. Bound not by aesthetics, but a common commitment to working cooperatively and sharing administrative tasks and resources, Mascher wildly nurtures the development of its Artists-In-Residence at various stages in their careers, lines of research, and explorations."*

The Past:

Founded in 2005 in South Kensington, Philadelphia, *Mascher Space* was the brainchild of choreographers Rebecca Patek (who has

since moved to New York) and Liza Clark (currently living in California). Initially the studio was inside of an industrial space on Mascher Street. The space was beautiful with a designated dance floor and mirrors, (previously used by Roko Kawai) but a few months in, the new collective was forced to move as the landlord did not want the space to be open to the public. The new space was around the corner on the 2nd floor of an adjoining building. In the early months of 2006, Liza Clark, Rebecca Patek, Loren Groenendaal, Jenny Sawyer and Meg Foley with help from partners and friends, power sanded the 3000 square feet of what is now Mascher Space Cooperative. White walled and grey floored, the space was empty save for three steel columns awkwardly dividing it. Later that year, with the help of Philadelphia Dance Projects, theater seats were donated by the Annenberg Center, transported and installed in the space. By the end of 2007, Mascher was named the "Next Collective Art Space" by the Philadelphia Weekly and the "Best Experimental Dance Lab" by the Philadelphia City Paper Choice Awards.



Mascher Space, March 2007. Photo courtesy of Mascher Space

Now, eleven years later, Mascher Space has mirrors, raisers, a basic lighting plot and sound system, AC, sound proofing, curtains, and the original hardwood floors. Everything this organization has ever created, including the programs and the physical repairs to the space, was solely done by artists' volunteer work.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing.

When Liza Clark, the biggest investor at that time, moved to the west coast between 2009 and 2010, Mascher's remaining five members were left with a large debt. We pooled our resources, created a three-tier membership system, and welcomed many new artists, paying off our debt over time. First-tier members paid the least rent, but were responsible for all the administrative needs of the co-op. The second-tier members were helpers tasked with simple duties, working up to five hours a month. The third-tier paid the most, but were not expected to help with the running of the organization. This model worked well for almost seven years.

There were moments when we thought Mascher would no longer be, but also moments of incredible strength and amazing programming. *IN FLUX Performance Series*, *Low Lives*, *FALLS BRIDGE: new movement*, *improvisation and performance festival*, *CURRENT evenings of dance and art*, and *Fresh Juice: Artist in Residence performances* are among the most memorable.



Greg Holt with blue wig, Marcel Williams Foster, Lora Allen and Christina Gesualdi at Mascher retreat 2012. Photo courtesy of Mascher Space.



Lela Aisha Jones at the Mascher planning retreat in 2012. Photo courtesy of Mascher Space.

For many years, key figures in running Mascher were Green Chair Dance's (retired 2014) Greg Holt and Sarah Gladwin-Camp, Nicole Bindler, Christina Gesualdi and Loren Groenendaal. Lela Aisha Jones and Marcel Williams Foster were the driving forces heading Mascher's development, securing funding and pushing us to engage with the neighborhood community. Christina Gesualdi instigated Monster Mayhem, among other programming, a casual and occasional performance of music and dance. Artist Emily Sweeney (now in L.A.) and Bilwa (now in Berlin), then collectively called perpetual mvmt<>snd, were membership and space coordinators, and were also instrumental in engaging and welcoming me into the Co-op in fall 2006.



Flyer from the first Rashomon Effect show by perpetual mvmt<>snd. Photo courtesy of Zornitsa Stoyanova, flyer made by Bilwa.



Rashamon Effect by Perpetual mvmt<>snd, 2010 – dancers Jil Stifel, Emily Sweeney, Alison Lorenzen, Zornitsa Stoyanova and Rebecca Patek. Live video by John J. H. Phillips. Musicians Gemini Wolf Red Heart the Ticker, Lillie Ruth Bussey and Jebney Lewis. Photos by Bilwa.

In the years when I produced *Current: an evening of dance and art*, I made curtains and created the lighting plot, then consisting of six Ikea dimmers. I presented some early works by Rebecca, Liza, Jaamil Kosoko (now in New York), and other guest artists. I will never forget the absurd, funny, and challenging performances of Rebecca: her vagicorn character in a crotchless white unitard topped with a unicorn diadem, prancing after her then-collaborator, Allison Lorenzen. Seeing Liza in her ritualistic and feminist pieces shaped the artist I am today. At *Fresh Juice,* I was inspired by many, but one I remember vividly. In Erin Foreman-Murray's (now in DC) work, I saw for the first time an imagined narrative inside a dance, created by an empty slide projector and performed text. More recently, I remember when Annie Wilson's famous *Lovertits* was born at Mascher in 2010. I was there to see it.

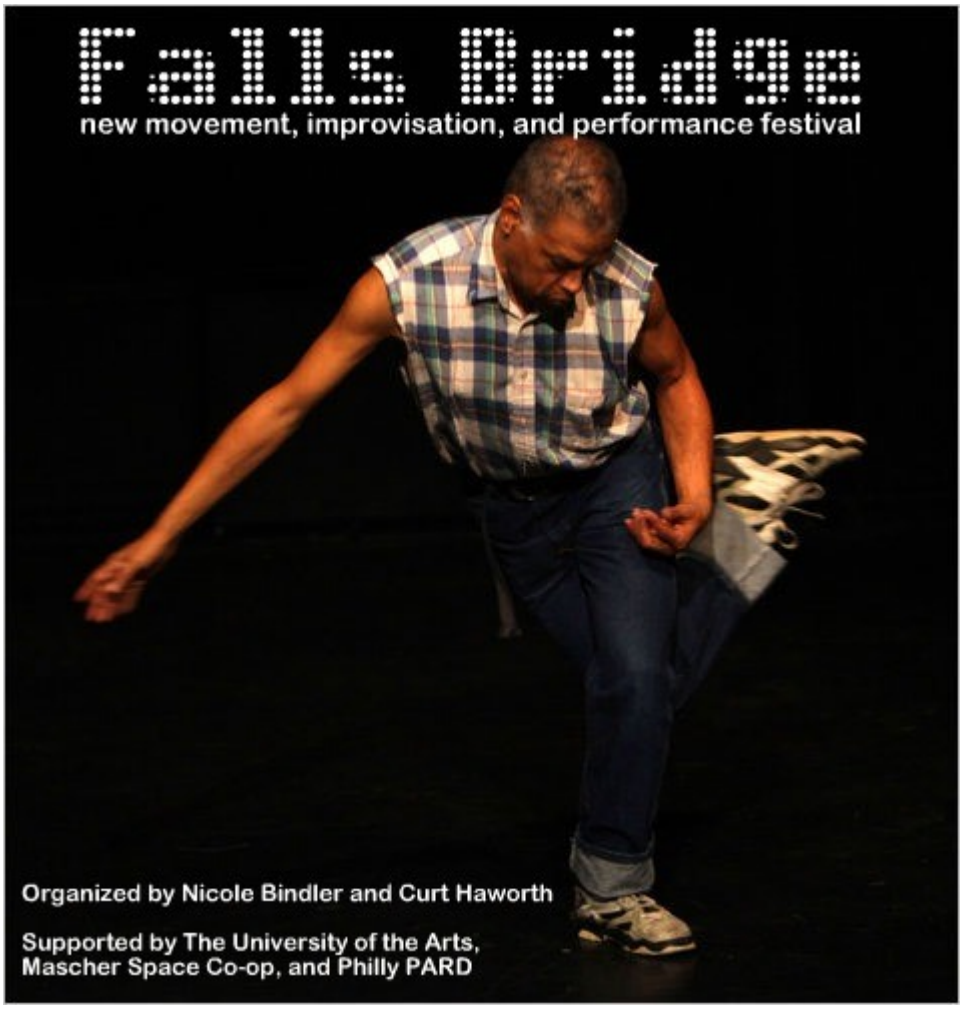


Still from Zornitsa's film "Insert Headset" 2007, showing the bare space before mirrors and curtains. Dancers - Zornitsa Stoyanova, Jil Stifel and Allison Lorenzen.



Paul Matteson and Jennifer Nugent at Mascher, 2009. Photo courtesy of Zornitsa Stoyanova.

In December 2010, after countless meetings and re-writes of bylaws, we got our 501c3 and started raising money and partnering with institutions. One of the best partnerships we had was with University of the Arts in hosting Deborah Hay for workshops and a performance festival, all made possible by Nicole Bindler. For years, Nicole also organized *Falls Bridge Festival* with help from UArts and Curt Haworth.



Falls Bridge Festival with Ishmael Houston Jones ?and Yvonne Meier, 2010. Photo courtesy of Mascher Space.



Deborah Hay teaching at Mascher, December 2012. Photo by Tori Lawrence.

Two resources we did not anticipate running out of were time and energy. As we grew and matured, we piled more and more responsibilities in our other jobs, lives, and expanding artistic careers, leaving little time for volunteering for Mascher.

Maybe it was easier to make a living five years ago, or maybe getting older has simply shifted our priorities. That is certainly true for myself. My first time going to Mascher in summer 2006 was also my first date with my now husband. Eleven years later, the reality of family life is so much more demanding than life was before we had kids.

Now and the Future:

In 2017 Mascher operates with a small budget and a safe amount of cushion money for emergencies, but a change is needed to make Mascher flourish and grow again. Christina Gesualdi, Loren Groenendaal, Ben Grinberg, and myself, developed a new internal structure that will address the need of artists to get paid for their work. In this economy, we felt that the volunteer and cooperative ideals of the past needed a monetary boost. In January, the collective is hiring three part-time administrators who will receive a stipend and free space in exchange for their work. This is the first time in the history of the organization we will not rely only on volunteer work. The cooperative structure will have little change; everyone will still be able to use the space as they want, for rehearsals, classes, or to start their own programs. All members will have a say in how Mascher continues to function, and they will be offered marketing and production help from the co-op. Instead of expecting everyone to volunteer, we are offering rent discounts to anyone who wishes and has the time to help.

In the spring of 2017 three new visionaries are coming to implement ideas, process needs, and help the Mascher community succeed in the future. While these folks are already inheriting awesome programs like Fresh Juice, H-O-T Series, Get What You Need, and guest artist classes, I'm sure they will bring much more to the table for both Mascher and the larger Philadelphia performance community



Photo by JH Ketris Photography of Vervet Dance, Additive Accumulation — with Erica Corbo, Loren Groenendaal, Asimina Chremos - Silverspace, Megan Stern, Mauri Walton, Elise Knudson and Mickr Kittens.



Photo by JH Ketris Photography of Julius Masri, Curt Haworth and Christina Gesualdi at Semi-Composed Performance during Mascher January Fest 2017 in Skeleton Key by Curt Haworth.



Photo by JH Ketris Photography of Asimina Chremos at Semi-Composed Performance during Mascher January Fest 2017 in her performance Movable Gleam.

Current Mascher Members:

Ben Grinberg - Finance Coordinator

Brendan Tatsuo???

Christina Gesualdi - Acting Director

Curt Haworth - Marketing and Newsletter Coordinator

Katherine Kiefer Stark

Loren Groenendaal - past Programs Coordinator, producing H-O-T series and curated Semi-Composed performance, Jan. 2017

Amalia Wiatr Lewis and Maggie Donoghue - joined Mascher Jan. 2017

Sara Yassky

Shannon Murphy

Zornitsa Stoyanova - Programs Coordinator, producing Get What You Need, Moms Make Art Residency and Mascher January Fest.

?Past Members:

Adam Kerbel,
Annie Wilson,
Antonia Z Brown,
Althea Baird,
Barbara Tait,
Becca Weber,
Bernard Glincosky,
Christ Center for Dance,
Carolyn Merrit,
Caitlin Hellerer
Dawn Ann Bryant,
Ellie Goudie -Averil,
Emily Sweeney and Bilwa as *perpetual mvmt<>snd,*
Emma Morehouse,
Erin Foreman – Murray,
Erin Lee,
Erin Shanti-Desmond,
Fatima Adamu,
Flandrew Freisenberg,
Green Chair Dance Group,
Haley Dulman,
Ilse Zoerb,
Jenny Sawyer,
Jenna Frome,
Jim Salermo,
Jumatatu Poe,
Joy Mariama Smith,
Kate Speer,
Lela Aisha Jones,
Lisa Rothstein,
Jenna Frome,
Christina Zani,
Nora Gibson,
Liza Clark,
Lora Allen,
Lee Shapley,
Lesya Popil,
Makoto Hirano,?
Marcel Williams Foster,
Martina Plag,
Meg Foley,
MJ Kaufmann,
Michele Byrd-McPhee,
Nicole Bindler,
Other Case Notes,
Pima Group,
Pink Hair Affair,
Rebecca Patek,
Rebecca Wright,
Sam Tower,
Sutie Madison,
Subcircle,
Tania Isaac,
Thomas Dura,
Tori Lawrence &
Emily Herchenroether,
UC Yoshi

If you have stories to share or you see factual discrepancies and missing names, please email Zornitsa Stoyanova at zornitsa@herebegindance.com

By Zornitsa Stoyanova
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