
Theatre Journals: Dance Liberation

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Theatre Journals: Dance Liberation

The first time I stepped into a gay bar, a line of people waited in anticipation on a flight of stairs going up to the disco, which was on the second floor of a club called *Going My Way?*. It was the late 1970s in Madison, Wisconsin and I was a freshman in college. From where I was standing, I could not see the space of the dance floor, which threw me for a loop—how many homosexuals were around that corner, I wondered, and would any of them recognize me from French class? Before I knew it, people had already positioned themselves behind me on the stairs, and now there was no turning back. This hadn't been my idea. One of the girls from my dorm floor had decided it would be fun to go out dancing at a gay bar, and I, who had no previous interest in disco or dancing, joined her for the adventure. She was a nice Jewish girl from Skokie who wanted to be a stand-up comedian, and I went along for the joke. Years later she would tell me she was bisexual, but that night we were two straight kids out on a dare that had more truth than either one of us could acknowledge at the time.

As we reached the top of the stairs, I saw the predominantly male clientele dancing together in what looked to be an activity that had been going on for some time. It both excited and frightened me. I was too scared to have a drink, let alone dance, and insisted we leave right away, which we did. I spouted ugly homophobic comments all the way back to the dorms to deflect my own sense of recognition. I returned to the bar, by myself, shortly after and under considerable duress. In fact, I was a nervous wreck. The practical concerns were more anxiety producing than the possibility that I might in fact be a homosexual. What if someone saw me on my way to the bar? And once there, would I be recognized? But I had decided that the risks were necessary. I smoked a joint beforehand and prepared for the worst. This time it was a weeknight, and there was no line to get into the club. There was never a cover charge during the week. You simply walked right in. That night I stood on the sidelines and watched as gay men in front of me danced in what seemed to me to be nothing short of a state of joy. Where did they get the nerve?

I can still recall the horror I felt the first time a man asked me to dance. It happened that night. The presumption that I was gay infuriated me nearly as much as the idea that I would want to dance with him of all people. I told him I wasn't interested in dancing, that I wasn't gay, and that I was simply waiting for a friend, a woman, who would be arriving any minute; in fact, I should probably go look for her. He said I shouldn't be so afraid of gay people, somehow knowing that what I had just said was a lie. I left danceless and with the bitter sense that gay life, if that's where I was heading, would be full of older lecherous creeps like him. Of course, he was a totally nice man in his late twenties studying for a PhD, but I didn't know that then. Years later, sometime in the mid-1980s, I helped him cope with his best friend's AIDS diagnosis, a gay man with whom it turned out I had sex with a couple of times sometime in between that night at the disco and that day in his hospital room, that is to say between 1978 and 1986, and who turned out to be among the first wave of gay men in Madison to die of AIDS. His friend, someone who worked for the Ford Foundation, was one of a growing number of gay men who had left Madison for one of the coasts and returned very ill. I was his friend's "buddy"—part of the small but growing volunteer social services formed in response to AIDS by local gay and lesbian grassroots activism throughout the United States. These services were founded locally in Madison in the mid-1980s by a handful of gay men concerned about AIDS and wanting to do something about it in our community. We—the Madison AIDS Support Network (MASN)—provided peer-support counseling for people with HIV, practical support for PWAs, educational outreach to the various "at risk" communities, public speaking and media liaisons for the extended Madison area, hotlines, and ad hoc fundraising to support these activities. Remarkably, in the early years there was only one staff person, who served as our director, and the rest of us were volunteers who overlapped in various other roles.

As a buddy, I was assigned to administer what was called "emotional support," and that meant anything from accompanying my buddy to doctor's visits, bringing over groceries, or hanging out on his bed sharing stories about our lives. We were also trained to support

our buddy's immediate kin, and given the stigma of AIDS at the time, more often than not, the client's buddy was the only other person who knew of his HIV status. Confidentiality was the rule. Gay life was always filled with secrets, subcultural codes, insider knowledge, and hidden histories, and AIDS wasn't all that different in that regard. But gay life was also filled with gossip, innuendo, and cruel exposure, and for that reason it was essential that we kept strict confidentiality around the clients we served. Even nearly twenty years later I am reluctant to name these men. In this case, my job was to support my buddy, and to help his immediate circle of friends navigate the reality of AIDS. But back at the disco that night those years before, my buddy's friend was simply the guy who had the nerve to ask me to dance, and I was simply the questioning youth who didn't have the nerve to take him up on the offer.

While many people subscribed to tired stereotypes of gay men, I cultivated a different impression. Gay people were not merely hairdressers, florists, and psychotherapists; they also danced, together, in public. To be out meant to dance, and to dance meant to be out. It was that simple, or for me at the time, it was that difficult. And at eighteen I just couldn't do it. Not yet. The next semester I left the dorms and moved in with two older women in their early twenties who were artsy bohemian types. Both were incredibly sexually active, and one, Linda, was especially drawn to dancing. She took dance classes, went to dance workshops, and was an all-around party girl who loved the nightlife. One afternoon Linda came home from classes with three new records—Sylvester's *Step II*, Keith Barrow's *Physical Attraction*, and Cheryl Lynn's self titled solo album featuring the hits "Got To be Real" and "Star Love"—and brought the disco home. For weeks we would dance around the apartment together to these records—usually free form hippie like motions or whatever recent steps Linda had learned in her jazz improvisation class. My moves were more boy punk rock jumps that surprisingly were as much to the beat of disco as they were to the Talking Heads. Sometimes Linda would choreograph scenes for the two of us in the privacy of our home. These were little performance installations that featured us in various stages of undress. For my nineteenth birthday she made a mock album cover for me of one of these staged vignettes, "David Román and the Muse." In the image, she was the erotic muse, and I was the passive subject although it was supposed to be my dream (Fig. 1).

Another queer cliché: she knew that I was gay before I did and she helped bring me out. Our home was both a space of dance rehearsal and sexual exploration. She once even had a three way with a man and another woman! Linda and her friends were having a lot of sex, and I wasn't. She would tease me about my needing to get laid by a guy and would encourage me to try to pick up men. She even recommended a few of her former lovers

who were into sexual experimentation. But for me sexual experimentation meant trying to find ways to get aroused by the cute art student girlfriend I was dating at the time, not hooking up with bisexual men. Once, after more failed heterosexual experimentation than I could handle for one night, I left my girlfriend's apartment at two in the morning to go back home. We lived on opposite sides of "The Square," the area surrounding Madison's capitol building. Who knew that this was a major site for gay cruising? Well, apparently and not surprisingly, gay people did, as I was soon to find out. Crossing the Capitol Square, I met a handsome man who invited me up to L'Etoile, the exclusive French restaurant and bar he managed, to smoke a joint. I told



Figure 1: R. E. M.: David Román and the Muse, Mock album cover; photograph by Linda Fargo, 1979. Credit: Collection of author.

him I was just coming back from my girlfriend's apartment, and he told me about Judy Garland, seahorses, and bisexuality. He was the first gay man I was attracted to with whom I had consensual sex and a lasting conversation. He was twenty-six, and his name was David too.

One night Linda and I went out together to Going My Way? and joined the others on the dance floor. I always loved going out with Linda; she was sexy and outgoing and she commanded attention from whatever crowd she was in, even a roomful of queers. After an hour or so of dancing together, she remembered she had a sex date back at our apartment. She left and I stayed. And then it seemed I was out. I started going out dancing nearly every night after studying at the University of Wisconsin's Memorial Library. Sometimes I would meet Linda there, but increasingly I went by myself or would meet David, or some of the gay men I met through him. The bar was only three blocks from my apartment, and while it wasn't the most immediate route from the library, it wasn't really out of the way either.

Mainly I went to dance and to be part of the sense of queer culture that the space enacted. Dance became the entry point to other forms of queer connection: friendship, sex, employment. But it also was a means in itself, a way for me to begin choreographing my own movements through the world as an openly gay man. I loved dancing because it gave me a way to be in my body and to be around other gay people in a way that was very new for me. The best songs of the time literalized the feelings I was experiencing through their titles and lyrics: Patrick Hernandez's "Born to be Alive," Sylvester's "(You Make Me Feel) Mighty Real," and Cheryl Lynn's "Got to be Real." "Disco," as Wayne Koestenbaum has written, "was the theme music of gay male sexuality in the late 1970s."¹ I took to this music quickly and readily. Soon enough I became a regular at the bar and within a few months was hired to be the bartender. The lesbian owners of the club liked the energy I brought to the dance floor and thought I'd be a good employee. I became the dancing bartender, a kind of go-go boy serving gimlets. Working there gave me the excuse for being there every night, and if my coming out was going to be happening in bar culture, I figured I might as well get paid for it. I also needed the money.

Shortly after I started bartending, I was offered a one-night-a-week spot as a disc jockey. I hosted New Wave and Deep Funk Night. These jobs led me to the other gay friendly bar in Madison, The Cardinal Bar, which was owned by Ricardo Gonzalez, the only other Latino gay man I had met at the time, and where my friend David was the house disc jockey. Unlike Going My Way?, The Cardinal was a community-gathering place that held benefits for various progressive causes and campaigns and whose clientele was racially and culturally diverse. It wasn't a gay club per se, but all of its employees were gay and gay people were always welcome. I worked the front bar at happy hour three shifts a week and the back bar by the dance floor two nights a week.

My coming out in bar culture enabled me to meet a wide range of queer and queer friendly people who all helped me figure out how to be gay. Everyone recognized that I was new on the scene, and for the most part, people were really cool about it. These jobs initiated me into the often-overlapping social networks of Madison's queer, progressive, and multicultural communities. One of the benefits of coming out in smaller cities like Madison in the late 1970s was the nearly immediate access to the relatively modest local lesbian and gay community. Everyone pretty much knew one another. Gay men and lesbians were forced to forge alliances for political gain, and we met across class, gender, and racial lines to do so.

Outside of the annual gay pride parade no other event would stand to symbolize queer community for me more powerfully than the image of us all dancing together, which we did often. I had come out and into a history of gay and lesbian struggle and resistance, in a period in the decade following Stonewall, where gay and lesbian organizing and

¹ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), 18.

community building were the mandate of the times. I stepped into an ongoing dance called gay liberation that formed my political and social identity. That meant dancing with differently-sized butch lesbian cab drivers, who demanded to hear “Mack the Knife,” even if the rest of us couldn’t dance to it; with recently exiled Cuban Marielito queens, who in their efforts to assimilate into US queer culture sprayed, and subsequently burned, their chests with Nair; with pretty boy model wannabes, who danced carefully so as not to break too much of a sweat; with mixed race butch femme couples, who rarely danced free form and always held each other close; with white boys who went to Chicago once a month for weekends of extreme sex at the baths; with drag queens of all races born in smaller neighboring towns who moved to Madison to wear wigs and pearls; with guys who had been to San Francisco and came back dancing with tambourines; with graduate students of all genders who were writing term papers on Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig; with sexy young gay men who took their shirts off and waved them in the air; and with the occasional baby dyke who did the same; with the town drunks who inevitably brought their drinks—and spilled them, broken glass to deal with now—onto the dance floor because they couldn’t dance or be gay otherwise; with charismatic bisexual girls like Linda who knew that this was where it was all happening at the time, and increasingly with men who I would pick up and enjoy for whatever amount of time we both would allow ourselves.

I realize that many accounts of gay culture overly romanticize dance as utopian, as the great democratizing ritual that brings diverse people together and that models a level of sociality that has not yet materialized off the dance floor.² (I should add that the same argument has often been made for public sex and the baths.³) I understand this impulse to idealize dance, as well as the various caveats that have been introduced to challenge this popular view, including the arguments that drugs and alcohol, so endemic to club culture, are unlikely resources to invest in for political liberation, and that gay clubs have histories of discrimination, which limit who gets to participate in these utopian yearnings. And yet there is something to be said for the image of queer people of all ages, genders, and races dancing together to Chic’s “Good Times” in the summer of 1979:

Good times, these are the good times
Leave your cares behind, these are the good times
Good times, these are the good times
Our new state of mind, these are the good times

Happy days are here again
The time is right for makin’ friends
Let’s get together, how ‘bout a quarter to ten
Come tomorrow, let’s all do it again⁴

² This is a standard reading of queer dance clubs. David Diebold’s *Tribal Rites: San Francisco’s Dance Music Phenomenon* (Northridge, CA: Time Warp Publishing, 1986) remains the classic text. The best work on disco is still Richard Dyer’s “In Defense of Disco,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Firth and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990) and Walter Hughes, “Feeling Mighty Real: Disco and Discourse and Discipline,” *The Village Voice: Rock and Roll Quarterly* (1993): 7–11+. But see also more recent arguments for dance and queer culture including Jonathan Bollen, “Queer Kinesthesia: Performativity on the Dance Floor,” in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) and Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

³ See, for example, Samuel Delaney’s must read account and analysis in *Times Square Red/Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

⁴ “Good Times,” music and lyrics by Bernard Edwards and Nile Rogers, from the album *Risqué*, WEA/Atlantic Records, 1979.

In the decade after Stonewall and in the years before AIDS, gay liberation had altered queer life in America and those of us coming out in this time were the immediate beneficiaries of years of political resistance and cultural agitation. Something was happening across America in the late 1970s that was drastically shifting life for lesbians and gay men, and it was palpable in dance clubs and in the music that filled these public spaces.

Perhaps the reason that so many accounts of gay club culture read it as utopian has something to do with the idea that dance, as a kinetic experience, enables social configurations of same sex bodies not imaginable elsewhere. I would go further, however, and say that for me dance was not merely the moment when the future was made manifest. It was also the temporal reality that queer people had made for themselves through prior years of political struggle: "Our new state of mind, these are the good times." This sense of dance's already liberatory enactment refutes the euphoric idea that dance only imagines a future. Dance does not simply forecast a possible world; it puts into motion the material bodies of queers in public spaces that were created out of political and psychological necessity. Dance signaled not the promise of gay liberation but its practice. I knew that the first time I stepped into a gay bar and saw gay people dancing. I just didn't know how I was supposed to step into that dance, and I didn't quite know what were the necessary moves to get there. But there was no question that these people had figured it out and created something for themselves and for others like me.

Early gay liberationists recognized dance as a fundamental component of the political movement and began to prioritize it as such. Dances were critical to the foundation of early gay organizing, although this history remains to be completely excavated. Harry Hay, one of the pioneers of the gay and lesbian movement and a founder of the Mattachine Society, one of the earliest gay rights groups in the United States, speaks of the importance of dance when recalling the history of the group in an interview from the late 1970s. Hay is reminiscing on the early years of Mattachine in Los Angeles:

Well, before there was any gay consciousness, before there was any voice speaking for us, we spoke for each other. In 1951, we had our first semi-public dance. People who didn't even know about our discussion groups came to the dance. One guy came up to me in the course of the evening and said, "man, you don't know what it means to be able to hold another man in your arms and dance and all of a sudden walk outside and stand under the stars and breathe." Well, we had a number of dances, with other people who until then maybe knew four or five others within their small circle who danced together. But these dances would draw maybe three hundred guys together. This was something very beautiful and liberating for those who'd never gone through it.⁵

As Hay makes clear, dance was not superfluous to the political mission of the organization but central to it. It was something "very beautiful and liberating" that brought gay people into political consciousness. And yet historical accounts of the lesbian and gay movement generally underplay the importance of dance. Same sex dance is introduced as something that was legislated against and that gay people had to carefully choreograph so as to avoid criminal offense. Or it is introduced as the colorful expressive practice of gays, who strove to entertain themselves in light of the oppressive conditions of day to day life, a sign of queer resilience.⁶ Sometimes dance is mentioned in historical accounts as an activity produced to raise money for political organizations, and while the dance fundraiser has a long history in gay and lesbian politics, it deserves a fuller account, which has yet to be produced by cultural historians or dance scholars.⁷ Apart from the personal memoirs of

⁵ "Harry and John," in *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives*, ed. Nancy Adair and Casey Adair (San Francisco: New Glide Publications, 1978), 242.

⁶ George Chauncey's *Gay New York: Gender, Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) is the best resource for these accounts, but see also Paul Siegel, "A Right to Boogie Queerly: The First Amendment on the Dance Floor," in *Dancing Desires*, ed. Desmond.

⁷ Martin Duberman documents some of the earliest gay dance fundraisers in *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993), and I describe early AIDS dance fundraisers in my book *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

veteran gay and lesbian people, dance is rarely discussed as a political activity no less critical to the movement than the marches and demonstrations of the pre- and post-Stonewall activists. Consider that in 1970, when the lesbians involved in New York's Gay Liberation Front (GLF) grew tired of the male predominance at GLF's events, they chose dance as the activity to mark lesbian space within the organization and produced the first "all women's dances" in the city. The April 3rd event was contentious for the group. Many of the men thought it might prove a waste of resources and a potentially divisive tactic, while some of the women felt it might replicate the worst of lesbian bar culture.⁸ But the dance ultimately proved enormously successful. Karla Jay, one of the key activists of GLF, explains:

When we finally held our first dance, it surpassed our expectations. The weather was cold but clear. The place was packed. We even attracted some media stars such as Jill Johnston, a columnist for the *Village Voice*, and noted essayist Susan Sontag. We were thrilled. My straight friends from *Redstockings* and *Rat* sat nervously on the make-out couches and hoped no one would ask them to dance. When no one did, some were insulted. Other straight women unabashedly danced with each other and with us. As one woman wrote in *Rat* afterward: "Dancing with women is something else again. It was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life—a total high. . . . I am learning to love women, and the dance was a first step." A few of the straight women went home together and brought each other out.

The GLF women had a fabulous time as we danced to our favorite music. We danced fast, we did some Greek and Jewish dances in groups and circles, and we even played some slow songs. It was the hip 1970s, and we rarely touched on the dance floor. Free drugs were easier to find than a slow tune. There were times at some GLF dances that I was definitely nostalgic for the bars. Those sexy bar butches, now reclassified as politically incorrect, held me tight when we danced.⁹

Although Jay's account of the early GLF women's dances distinguishes the socializing found among women in bars and women at politically sponsored dances, she nonetheless documents what these dances helped create for women in the early 1970s.¹⁰ It was dance that brought these women together, that brought many of them out of the closet, and that helped organize them politically. For many of these women, "dance," as Jay notes, "was a first step."

Dance was a first step for me too. A few months after I came out, I participated in my first gay pride march and rally. While my coming out mainly occurred in bar culture, it was also enabled by the university and a handful of brave lesbian professors who taught me: Evelyn Beck, Elaine Marks, Yvonne Ozzello, and Claudia Card. These professors taught me about feminism and its necessity, about culture and the arts, and about philosophy and the hard work of critical thinking. Through their classes I met other young queer undergrads, mainly lesbians, struggling with many of the issues I had been encountering as well. Increasingly, my world became more integrated—that's what it means to be out of the closet, I learned—and I socialized with these new friends from the university and my other friends from the bars too.

I spent the day of the march with my friends from the Cardinal and with my friend Trip from Atlanta, who I had met only a few weeks before. Trip and I had enjoyed the weekend together uncertain who we were meant to be to each other, which meant we tried a little of everything to see what might work best. Nearly four hundred people paraded up State Street, Madison's main commercial strip, to the Capitol, where the street ended. It was the

⁸ For a fascinating critique of dancing from the 1970s lesbian feminist perspective, see Felice Newman, "Why I'm Not Dancing," *Lavender Culture*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 140–45. See also in the same volume, Rob Dobson, "Dance Liberation," who argues for the radical possibilities of dance outside of gay bar culture.

⁹ Karla Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 129. See also Terrance Kissack's "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971," *Radical History Review* 62 (1995): 104–34, for a discussion of these early GLF dances.

¹⁰ And yet, as Jay suggests, with these political gains something was also lost. In this case, it was the touch dancing of butch/femme choreography.

largest march in Madison's history. I rode in the vintage Pontiac convertible which led the parade under the banner, "Gladiola To Be Gay," with my friend David, who stood atop the backseat dressed in a white genderfuck outfit as the unofficial queen of the parade (Fig. 2). The rest of us, who I guess were his court, handed out gladiolas to the crowd. This was the man who picked me up outside his French restaurant only months before and who helped secure me my summer job at the Cardinal Bar. DJ, "the differently sized" butch cabdriver, drove the car. The others in the car were coworkers from the bar and the restaurant who had taken me in right away. I was invited into this ever-expanding intergenerational circle without question, the youngest in the group. Granted I slept with a number of the men in the group—not everyone!—but it never felt coercive or weird. But that weekend I was smitten with Trip, and holding his hand at the steps of the State Capitol seemed to me to be the point of the rally itself.



Figure 2: Local newspaper coverage of September 10, 1979 Madison, Wisconsin March for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Photo Credit: Brent Nicastro, collection of author.



Figure 3: October 14, 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights Brochure. Credit: Collection of author.

After the rally, Trip and I joined the group at Lysistrata, Madison's feminist restaurant and bar collective, and danced together with the others from the rally and the day's parade. The music was selected by David and Chris, the lesbian house disc jockey at Lysistrata, who was also our friend. Throughout the night, DJ, the butch cabdriver, was trying to find the news coverage of the march and spent most of her time standing on a chair and switching channels and hoping for the best. The TV was elevated above the dance floor to allow for videos at night and sports television by day. But that night no one else could get near the TV, and no one else even tried. Everyone knew not to mess with DJ when she was focused on a project. Finally, while the rest of us are dancing, and with DJ standing on a chair with her scotch and lit cigar, she finds it—the right station at the right moment—there we are on television marching for lesbian and gay rights! Chris and David immediately put on Sister Sledge's "We Are Family," and even DJ jumped down from her chair and joined the dance. Everyone was pleased and proud. And it was there on the dance floor at Lysistrata, in the midst of this queer group of friends, that Trip and I, while making out, decided to go to the first National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights held in Washington DC the following month (Fig. 3).

But a month later Trip couldn't make it to DC, and I went to the National March with a busload of queer Madisonians. The march—"An end to all social, economic, judicial, and legal oppression of Lesbian and Gay people"—was on a Sunday, and we got there on Saturday in time for me to attend Pat Bond's one-woman show as Gertrude Stein, *Gerty, Gerty, Gerty Stein is Back, Back, Back*, and then go out to the clubs and dance. (While I've never had trouble getting

friends to go out dancing, it was more of a challenge getting them to see queer theatre.) I joined two Madison friends, Brian and Abe, at DC's popular dance club Lost and Found, which was packed with gay men from all over the country celebrating the March on Washington weekend. Just as the disc jockey put on Thelma Houston's "Don't Leave Me This Way," someone named Tim from Virginia asked me to dance. And this time, there was no horror, no hesitation, no alibi, only dancing and kissing and shirts off together. Surrounded and protected by a sea of gay men of all backgrounds and ages, and dancing with this cute boy my own age made me feel liberated and alive. At the end of the four-column mission statement calling for the National March on Washington, and after identifying the multiple reasons for "Why We Are Marching," the organizers write:

Most of all, the march will be exhilarating for all of us and give us the boost we need to carry on our work. We will be "coming out" nationally and greeting our sisters and brothers in a unified demonstration of our pride, our spirit, and our determination to have our rights.¹¹

The next day's march undoubtedly accomplished that and more for me, but the events the night before at Pat Bond's solo performance and the late night dancing at Lost and Found added to the exhilaration promised by the March's organizers. Lesbian and gay people had any number of places to go dancing that weekend, and as the lines and crowds made evident, for many of us dancing was a prerequisite to the March itself. Dancing and marching were not antithetical activities, nor were they located at different points on some assumed continuum of political agency.

I imagine that there were many people who went out dancing on the night before the March on Washington who did not participate in the next day's unprecedented political events. (In fact, I was out so late dancing and carrying on that I overslept the next morning and missed my transportation to the Mall.) And I imagine that many of those people had no interest in political protests of any kind. But many of us combined the activities because that's what it meant to be out. That was the point. Quite simply, if you were out, you more than likely went out too. You danced and you marched. That's what I was taught by my queer mentors, and that's what I practiced that weekend: dance liberation.

There's an amazing scene in *The Boys in the Band*, Mart Crowley's important and controversial play, where the group of gay friends, who have gathered at the New York apartment of their host Michael for their friend Harold's surprise thirtieth birthday party, begin to dance. It's 1968 and the men, who are in their late twenties and early thirties, begin dancing one at a time, each one stepping into the beat and moving to the music. The dance scene comes midway through the first act, at the point in the party when the gay friends have relaxed and allowed themselves a temporary break from the hostilities of the straight world, which will soon interrupt their party as well. But, before then, and after loosening up, one guest, Hank, puts on a record and Bernard, the only black man in the group, begins to "move in time to the music."¹² Crowley's stage directions read: "Michael joins in," and then "Michael and Bernard are now dancing freely." After a knock on the door, Emory, the resident camp queen, quips, "Oh my God! It's Lily Law! Everybody three feet apart!," a reminder of both the high stakes involved in queer dancing and socializing in the years before Stonewall, and a reminder of the routineness of these raids themselves for lesbians and gays at the time. But it's neither "Lily Law" nor Harold, the birthday friend, at the door, but a delivery boy with a cake. Relieved, the group returns to their dancing, a kinesthetic ritual of knowingness that signals the subcultural codes of queer collectivity and belonging.

The party was threatened once already when Michael's old acquaintance Alan (who is married and lives in DC but happened to be in New York City that day) called unexpectedly and, in a moment of personal distress, invited himself over. It turned out that

¹¹ "Why We Are Marching," unsigned political pamphlet, *National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights*, 14 October 1979.

¹² Mart Crowley, *The Boys in the Band* (New York, Noonday Press, 1968), 54.

Alan and his wife were having troubles, and Alan needed a friend. But, by the end of the phone call, Alan decided against stopping by, much to Michael's relief. Michael, who is not out to Alan, is now free to relax into the party's festive and campy antics without the fear of homophobic interruption. He returns to join his dancing friends and, as Crowley writes, "falls in line with them." Here is how Crowley brings the boys in the band back to the dance:

Larry: Hey Bernard, do you remember that thing we used to do on Fire Island?

[Larry starts doing a kind of Madison.]

Bernard: That was "in" so far back I think I've forgotten.

Emory: I remember.

[Pops up—starts doing the steps. Larry and Bernard start to follow.]

Larry: Yeah that's it.

[Michael enters from the kitchen, falls in line with them.]

Michael: Well, if it isn't the Geriatric Rockettes!

[Now they are all doing nearly a precision routine. Donald comes to sit on the arm of a chair, sip his drink, and watch in fascination. Hank goes to the bar to get another beer.

The door buzzer sounds. No one seems to hear it. It buzzes again. Hank turns toward the door, hesitates. Looks toward Michael, who is now deeply involved in the intricacies of the dance. No one it seems, has heard the buzzer but Hank, who goes to the door, opens it wide to reveal Alan. He is dressed in black tie.

The dancers continue, turning and slapping their knees and heels and laughing with abandon. Suddenly Michael looks up, stops dead. Donald sees this and turns to see what Michael has seen. Slowly he stands up.

Michael goes to the record player, turns it off abruptly. Emory, Larry, and Bernard come to out-of-step halts, look to see what's happened.

Michael: I thought you said you weren't coming.

Alan: I . . . well, I'm sorry. . .

Michael: [Forced lightly] We were just—acting silly . . . Emory was just showing us this . . . silly dance.

The silly dance, of course, is anything but silly. It was the one activity that the friends were able to do together as a group that demonstrated their affectional connection and provided them a sense of pleasure. The silly dance ruptures the division between public and private as the group integrates the two generally separate spheres of sociality into one where the distinction between them blurs. This moment—of both the closet and its defiance, of both the memory of queer sociality and its enactment—is for me one of the great moments of gay theatre. It tells us everything we need to know about queer history, style, and sociality and about the pressures and possibilities of gay life for urban gay men before Stonewall. Dance features prominently in this history, and its importance to the friends in Michael's apartment is made palpable by what is lost with the arrival of the uninvited guest who crashes the party and stops the dance cold. The friends bring the dance home to reenact the liberatory pleasures of the Fire Island retreat in the assumed safety and comfort of domesticity. But Alan's arrival—the classic intruder plot—challenges this achievement and puts it to the test.

In this short scene the friends recreate a moment of queer sociality undertaken through dance in Fire Island and relive it in the moment of the now. This rehearsal of history enables the boys in the band to occupy the present as gay male friends. Emory, the camp queen, is the one who remembers the moves and thus might be said to be the group's historian and preserver of the archive. It is Emory, the most effeminate of them, who can retrieve the body's kinesthetic memory and offer it back to the group so they could continue to dance, "laughing with abandon." And it is Emory who resists the conformity of the regulatory moves of homosexual shame and humiliation that the friends resort to once the music stops. The drama of the play is not whether Alan is gay or straight, or whether he will stay or go—he's the least compelling of the characters—but whether or not the friends can return to that moment of abandon made possible earlier in the evening by the dance. They did it already once before, and the play must be now about figuring out how to do it again.

Most critics read *The Boys in the Band* as a play of gay stereotypes and self-hatred and focus their readings on Michael's gradual decline into hysterical self-loathing. Understandably,

the scenes where Alan beats on Emory and where Harold admonishes Michael for his behavior become the critical focus. The dance sequence, on the other hand, gets virtually no mention in these assessments of the play.¹³ (One critic, however, included, as something of an afterthought, the following remark at the end of his review: “And one more matter—perhaps it’s my thing, but I just can’t take guys dancing with each other. It only looks like pathetic imitation of men with women.”¹⁴) Though the men are unable to escape the night’s demoralizing events, they are not completely defeated at the end. No one leaves alone, and while they are bruised and battered, their friendships prevail.¹⁵ Crowley’s insertion of the dance scene early on in the play makes a significant representational intervention that showcases the fundamental necessity of gay friendship networks and highlights the moves that might be necessary to keep homophobia and gay shame at bay. Looking at dance also allows for a more complicated and nuanced reading of the play to emerge, one that challenges the reading put forward by critics who mainly interpret the play’s text. This scene in *The Boys in the Band* suggests one of the critical roles that dance plays in queer culture and by extension queer history, and it suggests that dance is more central to queer life than scholars have previously acknowledged.

These early dances of gay liberation, each localized and enacted in vulnerable queer space—whether it be in Los Angeles in 1951 or New York in 1970 or, as in the case of Crowley’s play, on an Off-Broadway stage in 1968—predated my own disco excursions of the late 1970s. But they helped form the history that made my participation possible. These earlier events were undertaken within the context of social, political, and cultural struggle, and those dancers—real and imagined—helped move this struggle forward even if many of them had no intention of doing so at the time.

During the intense first decade of the AIDS epidemic many of my Madison friends from the bars, including some of my coworkers from the Cardinal Bar and Going My Way?, would die. Many of these friends, most of whom were in their early twenties, moved from Madison to San Francisco or New York in the early 1980s in order to exchange the intimacy of Madison for the anonymity of the big city, a standard migration for Midwestern boys then and now.¹⁶ I made the opposite migration from the East Coast to the Midwest and stayed there for nearly ten years and for most of my twenties. In 1987, after nine years in Madison, I moved to Chicago and continued my involvement with community-based AIDS service organizations, including the local chapter of the Names Project, or the AIDS memorial quilt as it is more widely known. During its display at Navy Pier in the summer of 1988, before it would head to Washington DC later that fall and where over 8000 panels would be displayed on the Ellipse in front of the White House, my partner Doug and I helped with many other volunteers unveil the quilt in Chicago. It was here that I saw the panel for Keith Barrow, the young soulful singer of *Physical Attraction*, one of the albums Linda had brought home those years before (Fig. 4). He was never afforded the success of

¹³ See, for example, John Clum, *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000) and Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). But see also Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis 1940–1996* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) for the historical backdrop to the play’s reception at the time. The dance scene quoted above appears on p. 56–57.

¹⁴ Martin Gottfried, theatre review of *The Boys in the Band*, *Women’s Wear Daily*, 15 April 1968.

¹⁵ Vito Russo offers an alternative reading to *The Boys in the Band* when discussing the 1970 film adaptation of the play in his classic *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, revised edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1987). Russo addresses the standard critiques of the play but allows for a representational breakthrough through the characters of the homosexual couple Hank and Larry. “The possibility that there could be non-stereotypical homosexuals who are also staunch advocates of a working gay relationship is presented by the two lovers throughout the film,” he writes. But he also adds, “and they are the two characters most often ignored by critics and analysts of the film,” 175.

¹⁶ On this topic see *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men From the Rural Midwest*, ed. Will Fellows (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

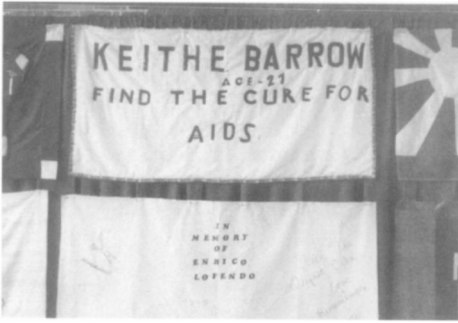


Figure 4: Quilt panels for Keith Barrow and Enrico Lofendo, The Names Project. Credit: David Román, 1987.

some of the other artists of the disco era, but that might have something to do with the fact that he died at the age of 27. Stitched on his panel is the simple and urgent message: "Find the Cure for AIDS." His mother, an active member of Chicago's African American gospel community, had been invited to read names at the display, and I felt very privileged recognizing her son and his music when she read aloud his name. In his memory, and in the memory of so many others who had died, Doug and I and some of the other volunteers that weekend went out dancing.

A few years later, in 1990, Doug and I moved to Los Angeles. I was teaching at

Pomona College on a one-year visiting appointment, my first academic job after securing my PhD. While we were both very involved in ACT UP-LA, we also felt equally at home in less direct action AIDS activist groups. Too often the history of AIDS activism centers on ACT UP and less on the community labors that helped local AIDS service organizations do their important work. Many of us, in fact, who were involved in ACT UP also volunteered for the agencies that provided direct services to people with HIV/AIDS. Doug got immediately involved in AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA), helping with various services including the planning of the annual Dance-a-thon (Fig. 5). Through his involvement in APLA, he met our friend Terry, an older gay man in his fifties, who happened to be very close with Christopher Flynn, Madonna's dance teacher and mentor, and one of the first to encourage her to be an artist during her formative years in Michigan. Madonna credits Christopher Flynn as one of her major life influences: "He was my mentor, my father, my imaginative lover, my brother, everything. He understood me."¹⁷ Christopher, who had been living in Los Angeles, died a few months after we moved there ourselves. In the final months of his battle with AIDS, Madonna had bought him a special posturepedic bed so that he would spend his last weeks in comfort. Christopher had lived in it for only a few weeks before he died. Doug and I inherited this bed after Christopher's death. We had been sleeping on a futon for years, and we were more than ready for an upgrade when Terry, who helped manage Christopher's estate after his death, offered the bed to us.

Christopher Flynn has been regularly eulogized by Madonna, and her frequent and consistent work for AIDS is often in his honor. At that year's APLA Dance-A-Thon, Madonna, whom I have never met but have always loved, made a surprise appearance at the benefit (Fig. 6). She performed a short set and danced in Christopher's honor. That night Doug and I danced with Terry, some of our other friends, and thousands of others who had gathered to raise money for APLA by simply dancing. It was clear that Christopher's spirit would survive in the growing global celebrity of Madonna and in the local intimate exchanges of gay men like us who memorialized him

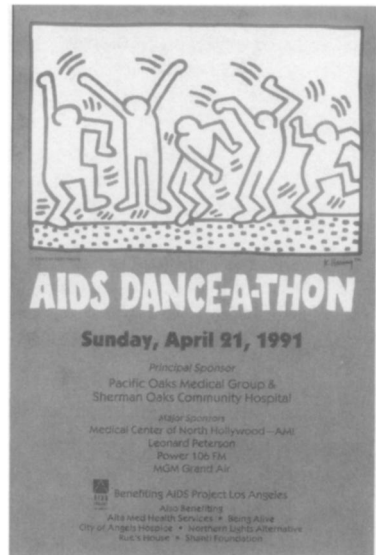


Figure 5: Sunday, April 21, 1991, AIDS Dance-a-thon Flyer, AIDS Project Los Angeles. Courtesy estate of Keith Haring and APLA.

¹⁷ Madonna, quoted in Andrew Morton, *Madonna* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 56.

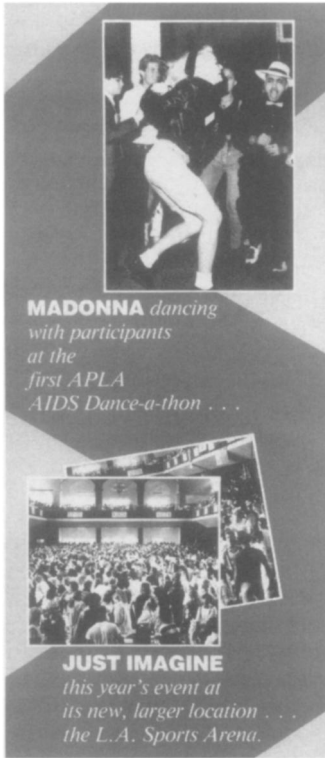


Figure 6: Flyer for AIDS Project Los Angeles featuring Madonna for the 1991 APLA Dance-a-thon. Credit: Collection of author.

through our dancing and the passing of his material goods (Fig. 7). I always felt it incredibly poignant that Madonna comforted her dance teacher and friend in his dying days by buying him a new bed. This man, who taught her how to move and was now immobilized by AIDS, lived his final days under Madonna's care. Christopher's bed, which I slept in for over ten years, and is now in my guest room, is a symbol of Madonna's love for him, and subsequently my love for the various men with whom I've come to share it.

A year later in the fall of 1991, Doug and I— and Christopher's bed—headed up to Seattle. Once again, we got involved in the local ACT UP chapter and the various AIDS community-based projects there. Doug volunteered at the Chicken Soup Brigade, Seattle's meals-on-wheels program, and I volunteered at the Bailey-Boushay House, a round-the-clock skilled nursing care facility for people living and dying with HIV. Most of the residents moved into the house during their final stages with HIV and would die there within days or weeks. Few people moved out of the the Bailey-Boushay House during the time I volunteered there. It was an incredibly sad place, but it was also a place of deep care, queer intimacy, and real love. I volunteered there on Wednesday afternoons and on Saturdays. Whenever someone would die—either from the House, from my circle of friends, or from the extended AIDS community of which I was part—I would go out dancing as a way to memorialize the person who had died. Sometimes I wondered if I just used this as an excuse to go out and forget about AIDS—dance as hedonism and escape—and perhaps that was a part of it as well. But mainly it felt like the right thing to do, a ritual to celebrate a life now lost.

Often I would go with my friend John, perhaps the angriest AIDS activist I ever met and undoubtedly one of the most astute. John, who was an instrumental force in ACT UP-LA, had moved with his lover, Larry, to Seattle, a few years back. I met both of them through my involvement in ACT UP-Seattle. John and I would go out to local Seattle bars and pound the floor, sometimes with our partners but not always, and we would not stop dancing until the lights came up. There was nothing lyrical about our dancing, just endless physical motion that kept us grounded in our bodies. At the Bailey-Boushay House I visited with men whose bodies were afflicted with neuropathy, a disease of the nervous system that numbs the limbs, especially the feet; men who were confined to wheelchairs and beds, whose mobility was completely compromised by HIV and who could barely move without the help of others; and men who were in states of semi-consciousness and whose relationship to their bodies was one of extreme distress or morphine-induced calm. I would visit with these men and sometimes wheel them out to the smoking room, where with IV-drip in hand, they would sit for an afternoon smoke or two; or we would go for a stroll up and down the halls, simply to "get some air," as one man would

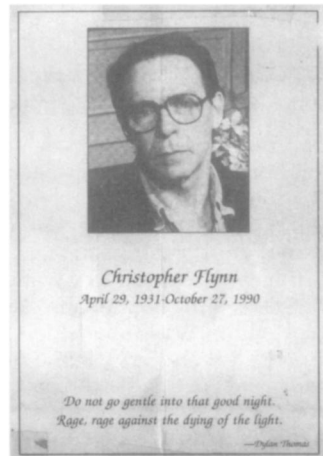


Figure 7: Memorial Card for Christopher Flynn, 1931-1990. Collection of author.

request; or I would sit quietly with them and gently rub their backs or hold their frail hands so that they might have some non-clinical touch in their day. Some of these men were alone and, except for the staff and volunteers, had no one in their immediate life. Some had already lost lovers and close friends and were themselves the last of their friendship circle to die. Of course, the staff and volunteers would establish close relations with many of the residents, not as surrogates of love necessarily, but as the real deal.

The simple choreography of getting in and out of bed for many was, well, not so simple. To be among these gay men and to have shared with them their final days was for me one of the most profound and heartbreaking experiences of my life. I cannot tell these stories without being overwhelmed with feelings and memories that to this day I do not quite know how to manage. At the time, I dealt with this confusion through dance. Dancing was a way to return to my own body and to differentiate it from theirs, a reminder that despite the prevalence of HIV in my life, I was not infected. I could go out and dance, and so I did. It meant I didn't have to talk about it, even though I couldn't given the required rules of confidentiality. Dancing also connected me with a history of queer resilience, a kind of reenergizing necessary to get through the week. But mainly, and especially when I went out with John, dance was a way to express my anger and feelings of despair brought on by the relentless death toll I was witnessing.

Perhaps the reason I found *Movin' Out*, Twyla Tharp's current Broadway dance musical based on the songs and music of Billy Joel, so unexpectedly powerful and emotionally effective had to do with the way it brought me back to the complicated feelings I've carried about AIDS over time. How strange that we never really know which performances will speak to us. Sometimes—out of nowhere, really—a chord is struck, a memory triggered, an emotion invoked that opens up a production that held no promise of connection. To be open to these moments is the challenge of our theatergoing.

Movin' Out tells the story of a group of youthful heterosexual friends who are torn apart by the Vietnam War. Each of the main characters undergoes a transformative experience brought upon by the death of friends and the terrible effects of war. Those that survive are forced to rebuild their lives with a sense of this history, because, as Joel sings, "the memory stays."¹⁸ The production, set on Long Island in the 1960s, chronicles the group's emotional journey through this volatile period of time. Tharp tells their story exclusively through dance, which is performed by members of her company and from the world of ballet, and through Billy Joel's songs, which are performed by a singer and a nine-piece band who are set apart on an elevated stage above the dramatic action. *Movin' Out* is neither a musical revue nor a dance recital, but a hybrid of dance and theatre that troubles easy categorizations. It can be seen as part of the larger trend of returning dance to the American musical and to the Broadway stage, a movement led by choreographers such as Susan Stroman, Jerry Mitchell, and others that started in the late 1990s.

In one brilliant moment early on in the second act, Tharp, who conceived, directed, and choreographed the production, has Eddie, the main protagonist, expertly danced by John Selya in one of the 2002–2003 Broadway season's most beautiful performances, rage against his war experiences (Fig. 8). In a sequence of vigorous dance moves that has Selya and other men from the ensemble leaping across the stage to the song "Angry Young Man," Tharp and her dancers hit the emotional registers of rage and resentment. While the dancing is fast paced and aggressive, it nonetheless conveys the vulnerability that comes with loss and that fuels deep-rooted anger. It spoke to the pain of a generation of young men broken by war, and while this was neither my generation nor my life experience, it felt intimately familiar to me.

¹⁸ Billy Joel, "Keeping the Faith," from *Movin' Out*, original Broadway Cast recording, Sony Classical, SK 87877, 2002, p. 17.

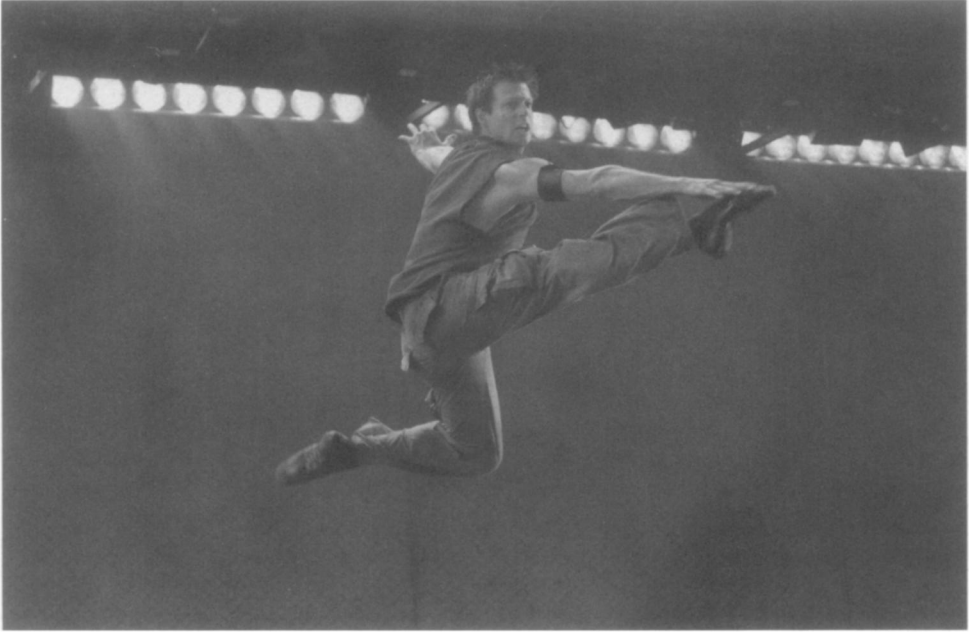


Figure 8: John Selya in *Movin' Out*, 2002.
Credit: Joan Marcus, courtesy of Barlow-Hartman Public Relations.

I did not anticipate my own response to this particular scene, let alone the entire production that framed it. Although I recognize and respect Billy Joel's talent, I have never been a fan and I own none of his recordings. His music does not inform my life, so my response was not already weighted with nostalgia or recognition. In fact I had little interest in seeing *Movin' Out* precisely for these reasons. I went because my partner, Richard, was curious about it and recommended we give it a try. More often than not, given that I am the theatre scholar, I end up researching and recommending what performances we attend. Every once in a while, Richard will suggest something that is not on my list. That's how we first ended up at *Movin' Out*, but it is the strength of the production and its talented cast that have brought me back to the Richard Rodgers Theatre to see it again and again on my own.

Movin' Out pays tribute to a particular historical experience of generational loss that may or may not be the lived reality of all of its audiences. It succeeds by allowing for intergenerational identifications that do not rely on the music of Billy Joel but on the movements of the dancers themselves. I did not anticipate having my experiences with AIDS summoned by this production, but scenes such as "Angry Young Men," and others later in the production that addressed the hope of communal regeneration, triggered them. "The thing that makes dance powerful," Twyla Tharp explains in the liner notes to the original Broadway cast soundtrack, "is that the audience can project its own story up there . . . Not Billy Joel's, not mine, but yours."¹⁹

Shortly after *Movin' Out*'s opening, one of the cast's principal dancers was killed when the motorcycle he was driving struck a taxi in midtown Manhattan. William Marrié, who performed the role of Eddie at the Wednesday and Saturday matinees, was on his way to

¹⁹ Twyla Tharp quoted in Emily King, liner notes to *Movin' Out*, original Broadway cast recording, Sony Classical, SK 87877, 2002; p. 9.

the theatre (Fig. 9). He was 33 years old and, according to Twyla Tharp, “He was a wonderful dancer and a huge heart. He was passionate as a human being, very smart, and there was nothing phony about him,” a tribute that could easily describe the production in which he was cast.²⁰ Near the end of *Movin’ Out*, in a scene entitled “Eddie Attains Grace” and composed of three songs—“River of Dreams,” “Keeping the Faith,” “Only the Good Die Young”—the ensemble, led by the dancer performing the role of Eddie, performs an exuberant ritual of renewal. Here, in this scene, Tharp releases her dancers to showcase their individual moves while keeping the idea of the ensemble, which is to say the community, alive (Fig. 10). It’s a well-earned moment for both the dancers and the audience. I would have liked to have seen William Marrié perform in this ensemble and notice the intricacies of his movements, and how he would have engaged with the other members of the *Movin’ Out* company. But in seeing the show, I trust that those moves are now embedded in this remarkable company’s performances.



Figure 9: Obituary for William Marrié, November 18, 2002, *The New York Times*.



Figure 10: The company of *Movin’ Out*, 2002.
Credit: Joan Marcus, courtesy of Barlow-Hartman Public Relations.

²⁰ Twyla Tharp quoted in Anna Kisselgoff, “Obituary: William Marrié,” *New York Times*, 18 November 2002.

I had hoped that a similar type of memorial and celebration would mark the much anticipated musical, *Radiant Baby*, which was based on the life and work of Keith Haring, the charismatic and multi-talented gay artist whose graffiti-inspired art work took the New York art world by storm in the 1980s. Haring's influence was worldwide, and the momentum behind him was cut short only by his AIDS-related death at 31 in 1990. *Radiant Baby* was directed by George C. Wolfe and was premiering at the Public Theatre and the combination of Wolfe, Haring, and the Public made this a must-see event for me. Unlike *Movin' Out*, *Radiant Baby* chronicles a world I know well and parallels my own life experience. Haring was only a year older than me, and we frequented many of the same New York clubs throughout the 1980s. Beyond that, I am a huge fan of his work, which effortlessly unites the political with the whimsical and is full of color and life. I went to *Radiant Baby* with Raphy, one of my oldest friends from Madison; my ex-lover, Doug; and my friend Tim, who knew Keith Haring from his East Village years. We had bought advanced tickets and coordinated schedules from Los Angeles, Wisconsin, and New York to be there.

Radiant Baby did not do well with critics or audiences; its run at the Public was not extended and a hoped for transfer did not happen. My friends and I weren't all that drawn to the musical either. Despite our efforts, investments, and projected identifications, we were disappointed in the production's one dimensional portrait of the East Village art scene; the overly cartoonish parodies of figures such as Madonna and Andy Warhol, who while easy targets for satire, deserve a more nuanced representation in this context; and the annoying insistence on having children serve as the production's narrative frame.

One scene, however, saved the production for me and made the effort to see it worthwhile. In a musical sequence that pays tribute to the legendary talents of Sylvester, and that perfectly captures the exuberance of gay liberation in the post-Stonewall years, the young actor playing Keith Haring discovers the subaltern world of Manhattan's downtown queer club scene (Fig. 11 and 12). Beautifully choreographed by Fatima Robinson and

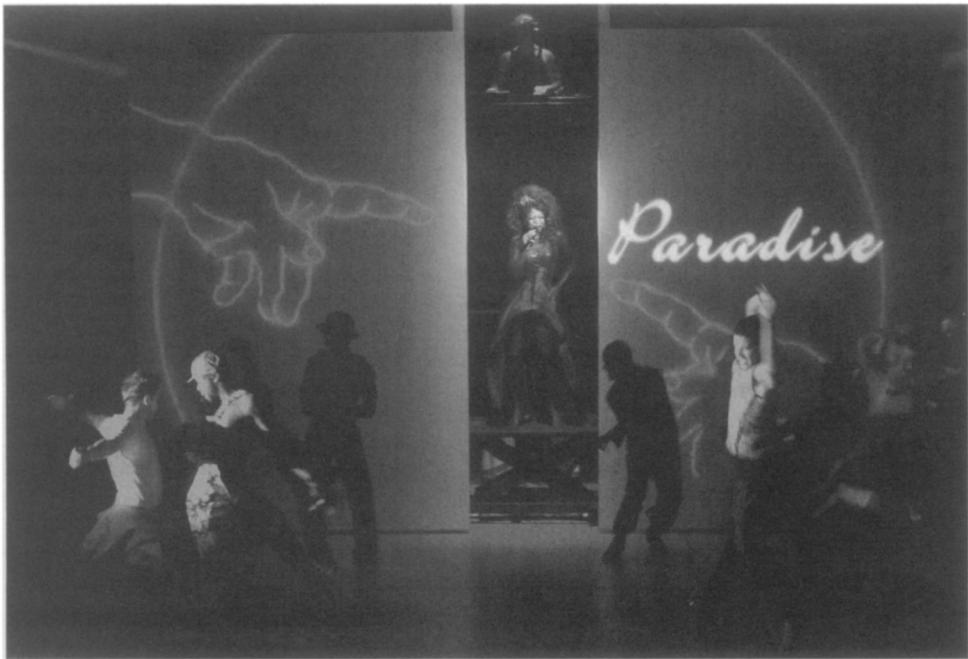


Figure 11. "Paradise/Instant Gratification," *Radiant Baby*, 2003. Photo credit: Michal Daniel, courtesy of the Public Theater.



Figure 12. "Paradise/Instant Gratification," *Radiant Baby*, 2003.
Photo credit: Michal Daniel, courtesy of the Public Theater.

joyfully and sexily danced by the young company, the scene showcases dance's centrality to queer life and culture. Young Keith finds himself at Paradise Garage, and in the midst of an infectious dance rhythm that he finds irresistible, locates the community that will shape his future. He learns the moves—or, more aptly, recognizes that the moves are already his—and joins the dance. He peels off his shirt to reveal his lanky white body and integrates himself into this racially diverse world, as so many young gay men have done before him and so many continue to do to this day, into the ongoing dance. This scene, "Paradise/Instant Gratification," is the one moment in *Radiant Baby* that, well, radiates. It was thrilling theatre. Not only did it capture the energy and vitality that fueled Haring's work,

but it also captured the liberatory and erotic nature of dance. The scene reminded me of my own disco excursions of the period and the reasons I was drawn to coming out. And yet there was more than mere nostalgia at the heart of this scene. It presented an archival embodiment of a queer history that was mainly experienced through dance.²¹ This history of dance is one that has not been fully archived by scholars despite its constitutive role in pre- and post-Stonewall queer life.

I've been out now for over two decades, and while I still listen compulsively to dance music, I rarely go out dancing. When I do it is to celebrate an occasion—the turn of the millennium, a friend's birthday, gay pride—that seems worth marking with what was once routine. Every once in a while, Richard, my partner, and I will go out dancing when we are on vacation. In Provincetown one recent summer we danced together at the A-House, one of the resort's larger and more popular nightclubs. On weekends the place is always packed with wall-to-wall dancers, gay people from everywhere it seems, who all end up in Provincetown for the same reason we do: queer ubiquity.

We find a spot on the dance floor and try to step into the rhythm of the dance that's already at work. I find this period of adjustment, those tentative moves of the body—a small step, a turn of the hip, a nodding head—a familiar rehearsal of the ambivalence I once felt about queer life and queer public space when I was first coming out. Soon enough I find my step and begin to dance. I turn to look at Richard; he, too, has found his rhythm and we are now dancing with hundreds of others. I draw him near me, bringing his sweaty body closer to mine. Here, on the dance floor, I experience the incredible intimacy of sustained touch, an erotics that so often seems only permissible on the dance floors of queer clubs. In these moments, I feel very much in love with him, and indebted to the queers who have come before us so that he and I can dance in this sweet embrace.

²¹ Here I would like to call attention to the ongoing research of Ricardo Montez, an advanced graduate student in Performance Studies at New York University whose projected dissertation is on Keith Haring.

I am pleased to present this special issue on dance, my last as editor of *Theatre Journal*. The six essays here speak to the vitality of dance scholarship and its importance to the related fields of theatre studies and performance studies.

We begin with Susan Leigh Foster's groundbreaking article, "Choreographies of Protest," an essay that illustrates how dance studies can reinvigorate conventional fields of scholarship and realign our critical focus. Foster wonders what dance studies might add to the already significant literature on the civil rights movement, AIDS activism, and critiques of global capitalism and then goes on to reframe these social movements through the focus on the body in protest. Her work showcases the critical role that dance studies, as an interdisciplinary critical intervention, plays in humanistic and historical scholarship. Jens Giersdorf's essay on recent German choreographers is also interested in the relationship between dance, history, and politics. His essay offers careful and meticulous readings of the works of Jo Fabian and Sasha Waltz in the context of the 1989 opening of the Berlin Wall. How might these choreographers articulate the ongoing debates about citizenship, national identity, and cultural practice? Giersdorf's essay calls attention to what is at stake when one puts oneself on the line of the tension spots of contested cultural terrain.

Anthea Kraut's important archival recuperation positions the dance work of Zora Neale Hurston in relation to two of her contemporaries: Josephine Baker and Katherine Dunham. Kraut situates these artists in the context of the black diaspora and the ongoing debates about primitivism, modernism, and the racial discourses of the early decades of the twentieth century. Her essay demonstrates all that is to be gained when the pairing of critical race studies and dance studies is made. The same can be said of Ananya Chatterjea's critical examination of the influential work of the choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and her exciting dance company Urban Bush Women. Chatterjea's work updates many of the issues addressed in Kraut's scholarship and when read together provides an interesting genealogy of African American women in dance and the performing arts. Chatterjea reads Zollar's dances, especially *Batty Moves*, as subversive. She creates critical spaces where African American women can reimagine their bodies outside of the force of racist and sexist ideology. Zollar provides her dancers and audiences an opportunity to rupture the grip of demeaning stereotype and reclaim the black female body on more pleasurable terms. Chatterjea's careful reconstruction of Zollar's choreography showcases dance's potential for engaged social commentary.

Graham Ley's article "Modern Visions of Greek Tragic Dancing" reinvigorates a conversation between dance studies and classics. This work allows dance scholars an entry point into the study of ancient theatre and dance, and it advocates the importance of dance history to classicists. The final article, Judith Milhous's elegantly researched "The Economics of Theatrical Dance in Eighteenth-Century London" is a fascinating study of the workings of eighteenth-century theatre, opera, and dance and the various fiscal matters involved for each. Milhous examines the account books and financial records and as a result recovers a history of dance's increasing appeal throughout the eighteenth century. Milhous demonstrates the important historical work that comes from detailed examinations of popular and official ephemera and expands the archive of dance studies to include financial records and other economic data from producing theatres, companies, and artists.

Together these six articles demonstrate why dance studies is among the most exciting areas of scholarship in the humanities. Please note that the review sections also highlight dance and dance scholarship. My thanks to *TJ*'s review editors, Dorothy Chansky, Awam Amkpa, and Louis Scheeder for coordinating their sections around this important field of study.

David Román