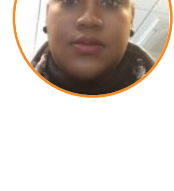


Dancer Valencia James in her living room. Photo by Whitney Legge, courtesy Sundance Film Festival

NEWS

Dance Had Its Moment at Sundance Film Festival



Nadine Matthews



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The Park City, Utah-based [Sundance Film Festival](#) is one of the world's preeminent film festivals, but even though there is a plethora of dance on film, there is usually not much dance represented at the festival. This year, however, there were three opportunities for those who are both film and dance fans to indulge the two passions simultaneously.

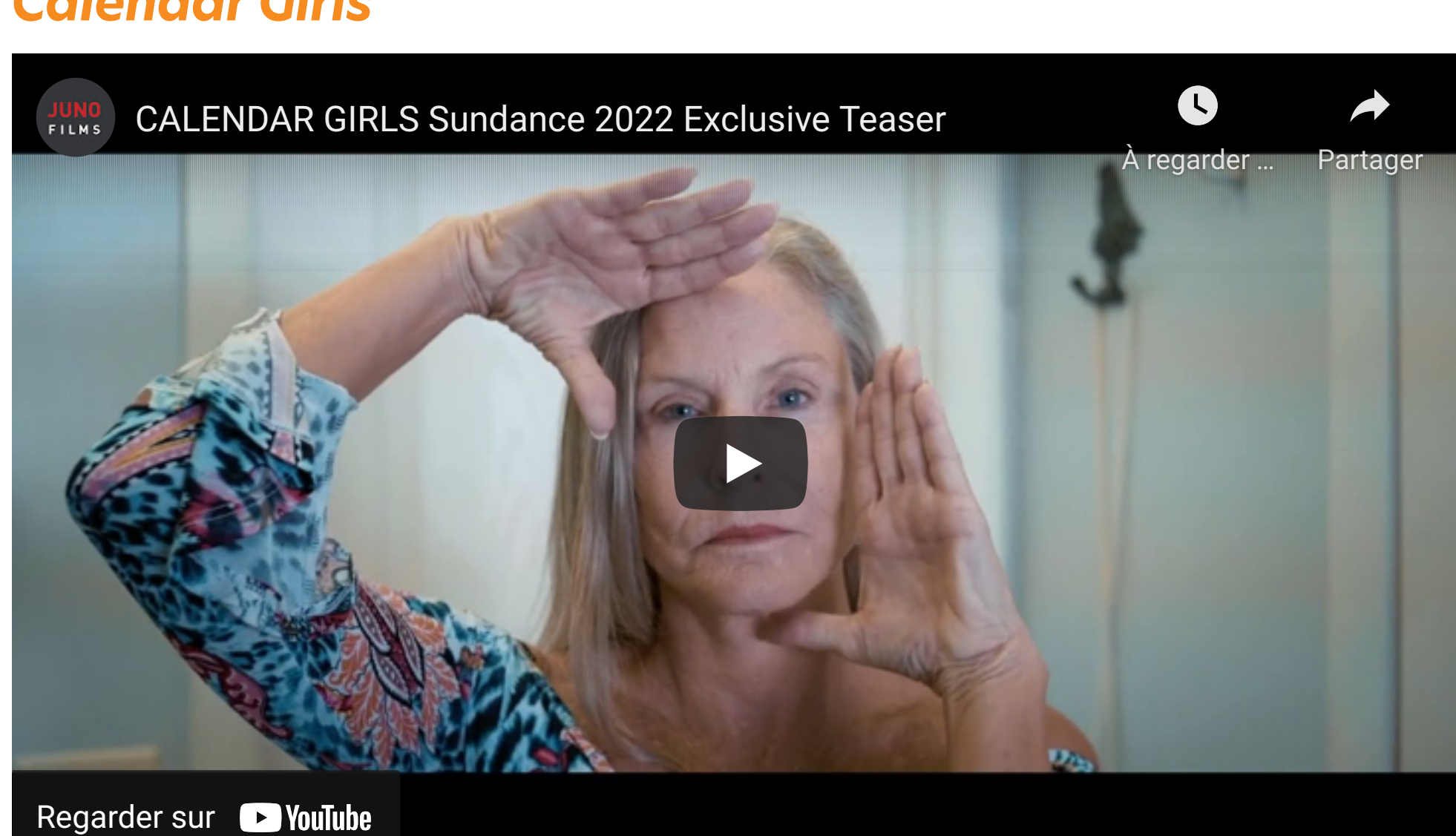
One, [Calendar Girls](#), directed by Swedish filmmakers Maria Loohufvud and Love Martinsen, was presented in standard documentary format. The other two, [Cosmogony](#) and [Suga'—A Live Virtual Dance Performance](#), appeared as "experiences" in the New Frontier section of the programming.

A separate online platform using the conceit of a spaceship, New Frontier is the Sundance Film Festival's space for immersive, interactive experiences, including virtual reality and augmented reality. Each audience member was given their own animated avatar, which they manipulated in order to navigate the immersive experiences, either with or without avirtual-reality headset.

The three-dimensional nature of these technologies perfectly lent themselves to capturing dance performance for remote audiences.



Calendar Girls



Who says you can't wear a micromini over a certain age? [Calendar Girls](#), that's who. And they'll wear it pink and tassled, with fur boots and elaborate makeup—and dance around in public with it all on, thank you very much. This Florida-based dance troupe consists of women over 60 who deliver more than 150 dance performances each year, dancing to everything from Paul Anka to Aretha Franklin to the Backstreet Boys. Stubbornly defying ageist and sexist conventions, they wear what they want to wear and dance the way they want to dance, no matter who is watching.

The program director, Katherine Shortlidge, explained to *Dance Magazine* that the group started out in a different iteration in 2005: "We were the senior dance team for the local NBA developmental team, the Florida Flame. When the team folded, we stayed together and became the Calendar Girls in 2006."

As *Calendar Girls* makes clear, the 36 members of the group dance because of the friendship and camaraderie they find as much as for an enduring love of movement. Most do not have professional dance backgrounds. The performances are done for free for nonprofit organizations, reunions, an assortment of festivals and retirement homes, all done with equal parts class, courage and gusto.

The film follows the women as they interact at meetings, rehearsals and their volunteer performances, examining how they negotiate indulging their passion with biological realities, public expectations and sometimes alack of support from family.



Some of the dancers are also followed individually, giving a more intimate portrait of their personal lives with their own triumphs and struggles. These segments are topped off by touching solo performances, beautiful in their sincerity.

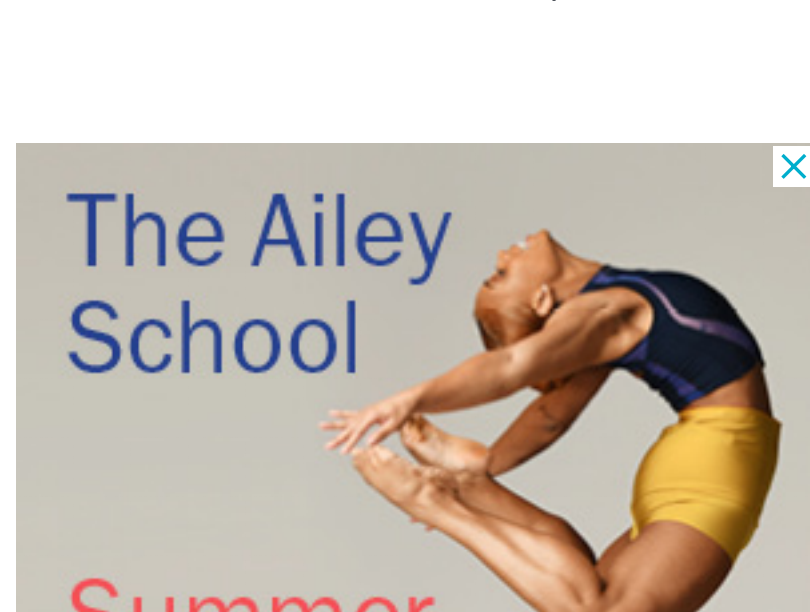
Suga'—A Live Virtual Dance Performance



Performed by dancer [Valencia James](#) and Haitian artist Sandrine Malary, *Suga'—A Live Virtual Dance Performance* is part interactive history lesson and part dance performance. The event took place entirely within [Mozilla Hubs](#) virtual social space, accessible via computer or virtual-reality headset.

In the work, James travels back in time, making the voyage her ancestors were forced to: across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the West Indies. Her ancestors were enslaved and made to do the arduous work of cutting and harvesting sugarcane and then processing it into sugar in the sugar mill.

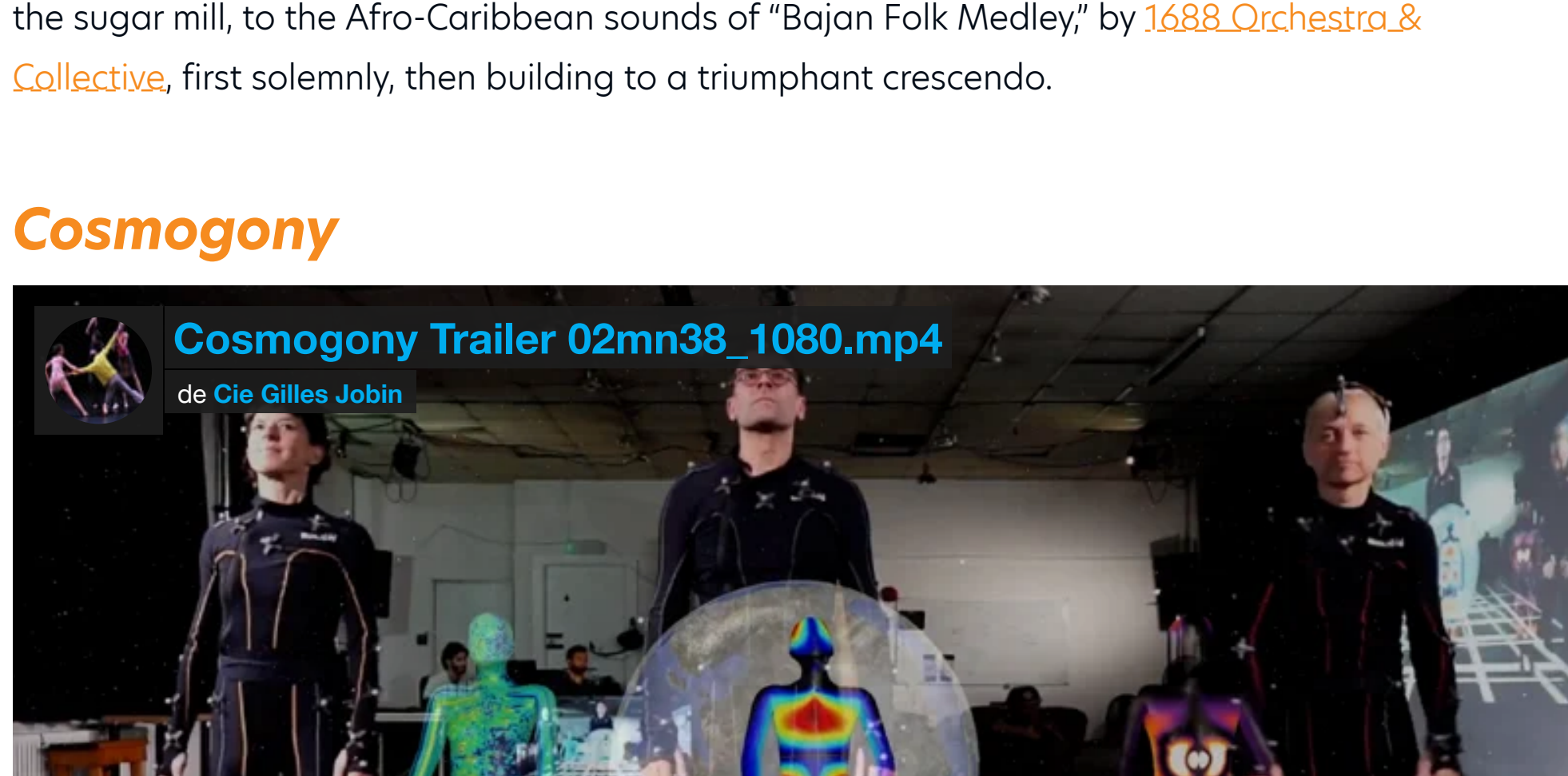
James, in a Q&A after one of the performances, said the history was incorporated deliberately. "I was thinking, How can participants leave this experience feeling empowered or incited to delve deeper or to seek out more information about the history of the Caribbean?, because there is so much hidden," she stated.



She also expressed the hope that this or similar technologies will be increasingly incorporated into artistic events. "I'm a dancer and my paradigm has been the stage performance. This totally changes the game. I'm hoping that this is contagious and more people start to take little bites out of this merging [of technology] with traditional performance."

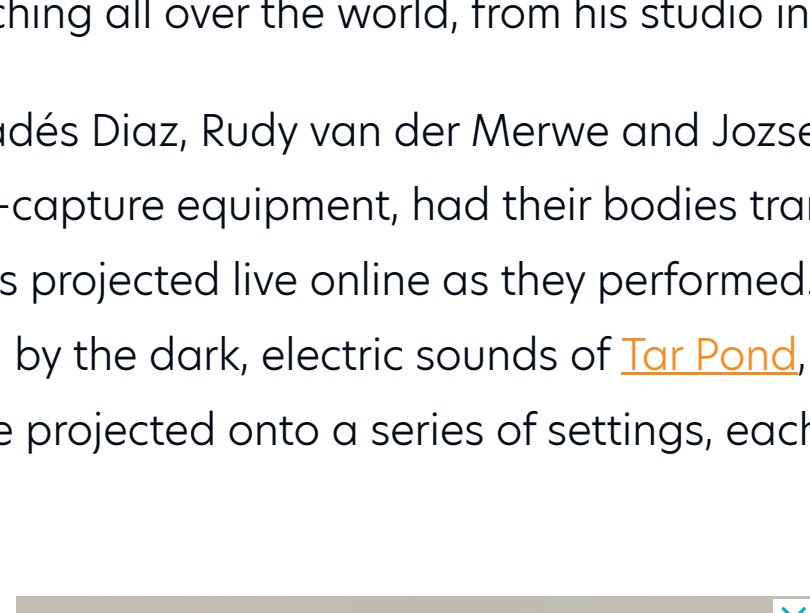
Unlike James, who keeps her real physical presentation, each audience member participates as a brightly colored avatar. They take the voyage with James (who is actually performing live in her living room), experiencing the sights and sounds of the sea, and the disconcerting feeling of arriving in a foreign land. James ultimately ends up on a sugar plantation, where she dances, in the sugar mill, to the Afro-Caribbean sounds of "Bajan Folk Medley," by [1688 Orchestra & Collective](#), first solemnly, then building to a triumphant crescendo.

Cosmogony



In *Cosmogony*, film visual effects meets animation meets live dance. Termed a "biodigital live dance performance" by director and choreographer [Gilles Jobin](#), he and his team used outdoor video mapping, indoor screen projection, video installation and web diffusion to bring live dance performance to people watching all over the world, from his studio in Geneva, Switzerland.

Three dancers (Susana Panadés Diaz, Rudy van der Merwe and Jozsef Trefeli), all wearing black bodysuits fitted with motion-capture equipment, had their bodies transformed into sleek, colorful avatars and their movements projected live online as they performed. Against a hyperreal backdrop and accompanied by the dark, electric sounds of [Tar Pond](#), the Swiss experimental doom-metal band, they were projected onto a series of settings, each of which impacted the way the dancers could move.

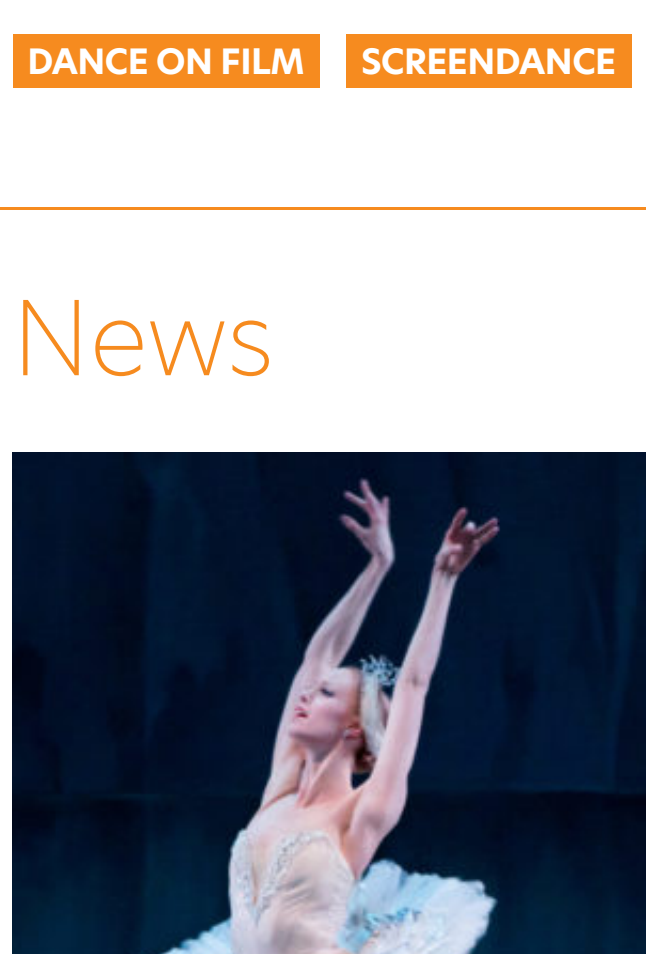


In a Q&A after one of the performances, Jobin explained that he did not choreograph in the traditional manner. "The way I work, I give them 'rules of the game.' I give them the quality, the context, and then they put their bodies into action."

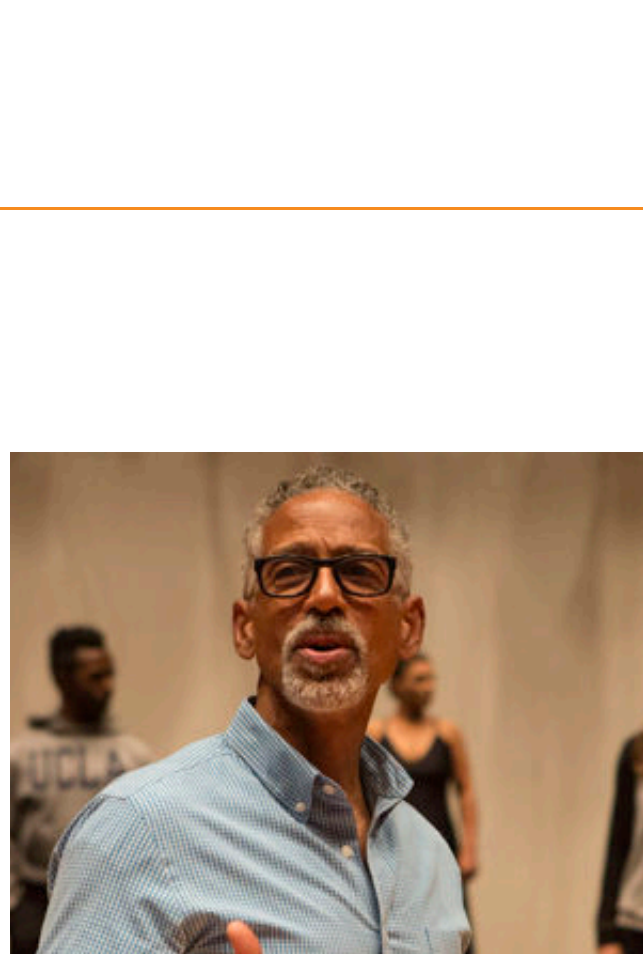
The result: The dancers hopped through a hilly field, gingerly stepped through asphalt, maze-like streets of an urban jungle, slid and did sprawling floorwork across a sandy coast, leapt and lunged through a grassy park, and, finally escaping gravity, twisted and tumbled through the cosmos.

DANCE ON FILM SCREENDANCE

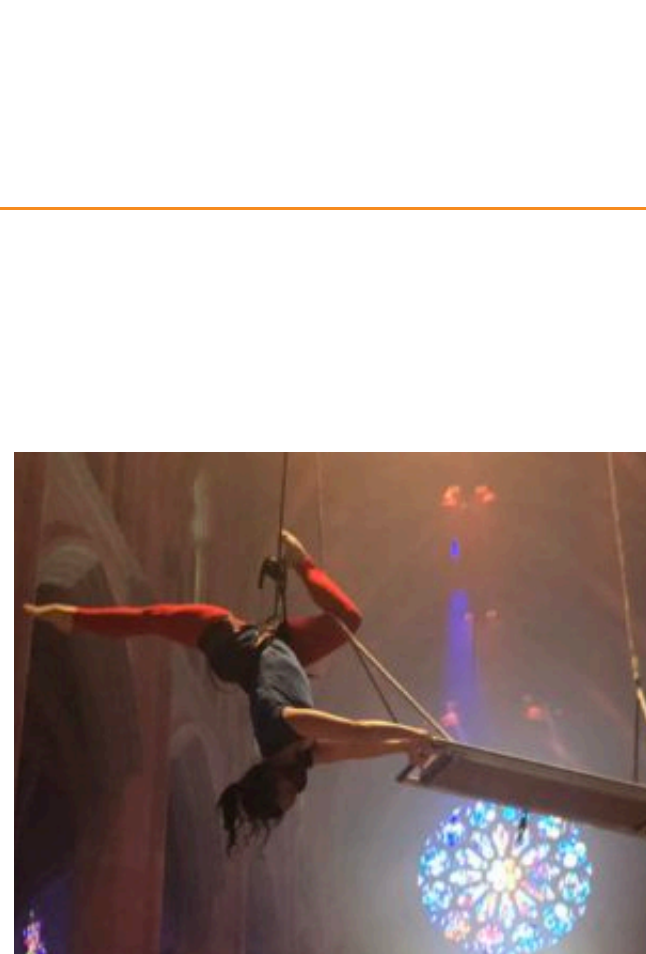
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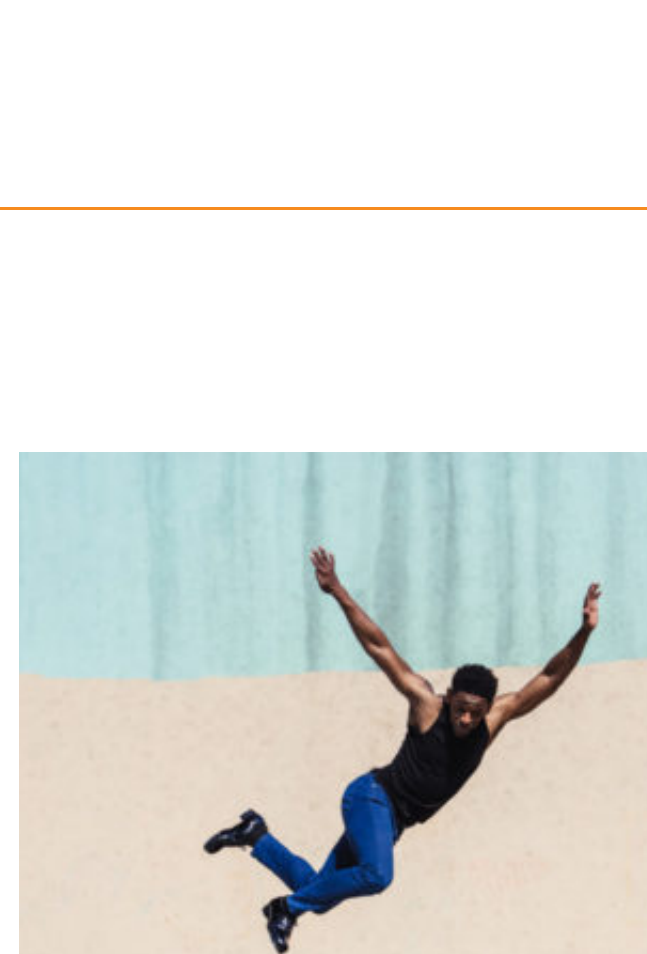
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