THE GATHERING 2016

#TheGathering2016

Sunday, January 17th, 2016
4:00-7:00 p.m.

Conceived by Camille A. Brown
Co-facilitated by Paloma McGregor and Shani Jamila

2016 Report by Michele Kumi Baer

About The Gathering:
Conceived by choreographer Camille A. Brown, The Gathering will serve as an open forum for intergenerational black female artists to support one another and to advocate for greater cultural equity and acknowledgement in the contemporary dance world. As trendsetters and pioneers who merit more widespread public recognition for their innovations, this evolving group of black choreographers will meet regularly to examine the reasons for this precedent and to embark on a mission to make their work more broadly accessible and appreciated.

2016 Goal:
- Building community and creating "next steps" for the work we each are doing or visioning.

INTRODUCTION WITH PALOMA + SHANI

- We will begin with creating a "container" for our time together.
- What will follow is a series of "facilitated structures" to get to know each other a little better.
- We'll be moving around the room a lot today and will later use the story circle model to deepen conversation and ensure all voices are heard/included.

HOW WE DO (a.k.a. collective rules of engagement)

- One mic
- Sharing the space
- Respecting different points of view and emotional responses
- Judgment-free zone
- Safe space, but not comfortable space

- Stay present
- Remember context
- Conscious listening…listening for understanding
- No assumptions
- Ask and own
- Literacy moments
- Releasing the necessity to know and understand
- Honest and reflective
- Step back, step up
- Ouch and oops
- "I" vs. "we" – speak from personal experience

PAIR PROMPTS + MOVEMENT EXCHANGE

Discuss in pairs and express through movement:

- What brought you here?
- Who brought you here?

Paloma: This is to "pepper and season the container."

What the group saw in the movement exchange:

- Rhythm
- Collective energy
- Sense of gratitude
- Harnessing
- Histories and Herstories
- Openness
- Embodiment
- Kinship
- Connection
- Commitment
- Fun
- Vulnerable

DANCE CULTURES GROUPS

What is an early dance experience/form that resonates with you? Choose one and join that group:

1. African diasporic/non-Western
2. Social dance
3. Ballet/modern/contemporary

Consider in your groups:

- How does this dance experience inform or shape or influence your dance work now? What about this form has meaning for you today?
- What values and assets do you bring into the space because of this?

STORY CIRCLES

Dance cultures groups divided and combined as necessary to form groups of around six people for story circles.

Prompt:

- Share a pivotal moment in your journey.
- Include the what, where, when, how.
- How did you feel then? How do you feel about it now?

Phrases overheard during storytelling:

- "I think of myself as a nomad"
- "that opened me up to a world"
- "gave myself permission"
- "taking up that work"
- "I didn't know where I am going, what I am doing"
- "I was like, 'in your face!'"
- "it's mostly autobiographical, my art is mostly autobiographical"
- "expansive thinking and imagining"

What I (Michele) observed around the room during story circles:

- engaged eye contact
- leaning towards (different from the now popularized "lean in"; I use "towards" here to indicate an interpersonal directionality)
- nods, both fast and slow
- laughter, infectious laughter
- a collective energy rising and falling
- embodied storytelling through gestures and movement

MOVEMENT SYNTHESIS OF THE STORY CIRCLES

How did the story circle process feel to you? Responses:

- "Awesome"
- "Good"
- "Yeah"

- "It felt like a release"
- "Out and in, when water absorbs into the skin"
- "Absorbing the thinking without having to answer"
- "Intimate"
- "Listening to people telling stories about listening to themselves"
- "Related, connected, like we've known each other for a long time"
- "Intimate bubble, everyone else became the background"
- "Cleansing moment"
- "Healing moment"

Any commonalities? (Or differences?) Responses:

- Owning power in a way that says, "I can take a risk."
- Maintaining composure in the face of risk
- Managing and negotiating risk
- A lot of gratitude, when memories come up it helps promote appreciation
- Gratitude and joy
- Deadlines, timelines, running out of time
- Presence of family
- Self-reflection and personal evaluation
- Empowerment
- Recognition of change or transformation
- Choosing a path and honoring it

Primary take-aways expressed by the group:

- Authenticity
- Importance of mentorship and community
- Stepping outside your box
- Knowing yourself and listening to yourself
- Listening to yourself in others
- Being uncomfortable promotes growing
- Time is a teacher if you have patience
- How feeding and affirming it is to see and talk to a lot of POCs in dance
- Thank God to Camille A. Brown for doing this, and may we gather more?
- Appreciate commonalities and differences
- Possibility of existing in my full self and being seen and witnessed in that and having others see and witness
- How easy it can be to see someone else

- Once you strip the mask of having to explain yourself (your gender and/or race) these stories start to flow in a way that makes them individual and universal…creating heart-to-heart connections
- Being okay being vulnerable
- Not being afraid to take up space
- We have a rite of passage to ourselves to be that vessel…that spiritual conduit
- Know your magic

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE

Prompt:

- Write a letter to yourself to remind yourself of what you want to take with you from this moment that you've had here together. Letter will be sent to you a few months from now.

FINAL WORDS – A PRAYER

- "May these words continue to resonate…"
- May we… "just keep being us."

STAYING CONNECTED

Twitter Handles:

Camille A. Brown – @CamilleABrown
Paloma McGregor – @DancingWhileBlk & @PalomaMcGregor
Shani Jamila – @shanijamila
New York Live Arts – @NewYorkLiveArts
The Field – @TheFieldNYC
Dance/NYC – @DanceNYC
HowlRound TV - @HowlRound

SPECIAL THANKS

Indira Goodwine
The Gathering Manager
Company Manager, Camille A. Brown & Dancers

The Gathering 2016 Partners

New York Live Arts, The Field, Dance/NYC, and Pamela Green/PMG Arts Management, LLC

The Gathering Advisory Board
Cynthia Oliver, Paloma McGregor, Maria Bauman, Marjani Forte, Nia Love, Michelle Gibson, Christal Brown, and Amara Tabor-Smith.

The Gathering 2016 Volunteers
Clarice Young, Kimberly Mhoon, Ta'Rajee Omar, Rachel Watson, and Amara Tabor-Smith

Livestream
Vijay Matthew & HowlRound TV

Photography
Jacobia Dahm Photography

Social Media Manager
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Hospitality
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Report
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