



Sydnie L. Mosley Dances.

Feel human through dance.



The Great Day oral history party on June 19, 2019 at Lincoln Center. Credit: Jules Slutsky

**PURPLE**

**SLMDances' Community Engagement Process**



## What is PURPLE?

PURPLE is a multi-project universe that illuminates the power of “deep sisterhood for social change” through storytelling and movement. This sisterhood is how we thrive: we invest in one another, we honor and celebrate each other's brilliance, and we hold ourselves accountable to experiencing radical joy.

Each project is its own galaxy with its own moving storytellers, but these galaxies are guided by a common set of stars. The works are: **multigenerational, iterative, based in oral & embodied herstories, center sacred ritual(s), honor feedback loops and collective decision-making, and are inspired by the work & processes of our beloved ancestor Ntozake Shange.**



Altar created as a part of work in progress showing April 30, 2019 at Lincoln Center. Credit: Timothy Edwaujonte

PURPLE research is based in archives and stars, bodies and stories. Each galaxy embodies sankofa as it literally and figuratively honors and adorns our backspace as we intentionally craft our way forward into the cosmos.



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**CREATION IS  
EVERYTHING YOU DO  
MAKE SOMETHING**

**Ntozake Shange**  
*Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*



## Current Projects In Development



### PURPLE: SLMDances Ensemble Work

PURPLE dances sisterhood; it amplifies the ways we invest in one another, we honor and celebrate each other's brilliance, and how we capture our radical joy. Each of these interactions is a small miracle. That space between women is magic. It's PURPLE, just like Auntie Alice wrote to us so many years ago. That's where there is God. Spirit. True Love.

### PURPLE: Solos

PURPLE Solos are as much about the process as they are performed work. Centering the feedback loop between a veteran movement artist and Sydnie as choreographer and facilitator, PURPLE solos align the stars to highlight the brilliance of the performing artist. Current works in development with Dyane Harvey and Charmaine Warren.



### PURPLE: Community Engagement

PURPLE is a choreographic experience that captures the radical joy in a place -- public housing communities in NYC -- via the stories of its decades-long residents to uncover strategies of resilience, amplify cultural traditions, and shift public discourse and policy. PURPLE's community engagements facilitate the collection of oral histories and making those stories visible with site specific performances. Current engagements are with Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center and Amsterdam Houses.

Photo credits (from top to bottom): Amir Hamja, Scott Shaw, Jules Slutsky



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I think it pisses God off if you walk by  
the color purple in a field somewhere  
and don't notice it. People think  
pleasing God is all God cares about. But  
any fool living in the world can see it  
always trying to please us back.

Alice Walker  
*The Color Purple*



## Community Engagement Timeline

SLMDances works in communities we are a part of and have been invited into. PURPLE connects through existing and expanding networks -- literally talking to folks and getting introduced to the next person. This timeline tells the story of how we continue to build and sustain these relationships.

### February 2018 - June 2018

**Invitation:** Lincoln Center Education / Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts invites SLMDances to be the Manhattan Community Artist in Residence and build relationships with their naturally occurring retirement community in the Amsterdam Houses and Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center communities to develop PURPLE. The LCE Community Artist Residency Program offers community-based artists the opportunity to create, promote, and lead a multi-year arts residency that connects our artistic practice to the issues relevant to the area.



SLMDances leads line dancing during a monthly celebration June 2018 at Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center.

Credit: SLMDances Instagram

**Deep Listening and Community Mapping:** SLMDances introduces itself to the neighborhood elders through participant observation in community center activities, and offering performances and playtime during their monthly celebrations. We share lunch and learn about their interests.



## August - November 2018

**Invitation:** Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center staff invites SLMDances to lead a weekly line dance class, in addition to offering performances and activities during monthly celebrations.

**Deep Listening and Community Mapping:** SLMDances gets to know formal and informal leadership in the space, and identifies a member of the center who volunteers as an exercise instructor, as well as Advisory Board committee leader as a key stakeholder. She becomes a connector-facilitator-translator between members, staff, and SLMDances.

## November 2018

**Offering:** SLMDances hosts an informal work in progress showing of the PURPLE SLMDances ensemble work at Lincoln Center Education. This public event allows SLMDances to introduce itself to more community members including leaders of Amsterdam Houses.



Work in progress showing November 2018 at Lincoln Center. Credit: SLMDances

## February - April 2019

**Deep Listening and Community Mapping:** SLMDances goes on neighborhood walks with community members. The company designs off-site field trips that involve multi-disciplinary arts activities. The members are excited to go around NYC together, and the programming doesn't interfere with existing center programs and systems (i.e. daily classes, lunch time).



**Field Trip:** Planetarium at American Natural History Museum.

**Invitation:** Members of the community center invite SLMDances to capture oral history of residents of the neighborhood, particularly those who live in Amsterdam Houses. We also interview elders in our own families and veteran performing artists. We ask what brings joy, what has felt like a miracle, what makes them feel honored, what they want to create.

Amsterdam Houses. Credit: SLMDances



## May 2019

**Invitation:** SLMDances organizes partnership with Changing the Narrative and Barnard Center for Research on Women who already have an ongoing project and process for capturing oral histories of NYCHA residents.



Scenes from The Great Day, June 2019 at Lincoln Center. Credit: Jules Slutsky

## June 2019

**Offering:** The Great Day: First oral history workshop with Amsterdam Houses elders conducted in partnership with Changing the Narrative and Barnard Center for Research on Women. The workshop takes place on the Lincoln Center campus. Participants interview each other, watch performance, have their portraits taken, enjoy lunch and receive compensation for their time.



Elder community participants from The Great Day, June 2019 at Lincoln Center. Credit: Jules Slutsky

## September - December 2019

**Offering:** SLMDances facilitates weekly line dancing classes. SLMDances continues facilitating oral history workshops with Amsterdam Houses elders. During the course of three workshops, SLMDances tries out different processes for developing creative material generating some movement and text based on the stories shared.

**Field Trip:** For Colored Girls at The Public Theater

## 2020

**Deep Listening and Community Mapping:** The global pandemic effectively terminates any in-person activities with elder community members. SLMDances sustains relationships by making phone calls and inquiring about community members' well-being and needs, providing tactical support where possible.

## **WATCH: PURPLE is...**

**Artistic Director Sydnie L. Mosley and Creative Partners  
Brittany Grier and Jessica Lee in conversation about  
community engagement process**



You have to come with me to this place  
where magic is.

Ntozake Shange  
*Spell #7*

# Devising Material

## Getting from Community Building to Co-Creating Performance

In order to co-create art works with community elders and within our collective, SLMDances continues to develop its devising process. Our process is multi-faceted and includes the following elements: 1) joint discovery: record elders' words & gestures, reading & discussion, attend related exhibitions & performances, research Ntozake Shange personal archives, 2) ensemble members bring experiential research into rehearsal, 3) collaboratively generate text, movement and sound, 4) return to elder narratives to guide dramatic action, 5) work in

progress showings invite feedback to be integrated from colleagues and community elders.



Our methods to generate material are informed by [Ping Chong's Undesirable Elements interview-based theater](#), Suzuki method, [Junebug Productions story circles](#), various improvisation practices (voice, polyrhythmic body percussion), as well as SLMDances collective ritual practices such as yoga and restorative circles. We facilitate discussion on key dramatic

questions, witness generation of material, offer feedback, look at all material devised to co-create a clear narrative arc, and document a script-score.

We want the PURPLE creative process and creative output to address the following: How do we adorn ourselves daily in our self worth, our spirituality, our wealth of love, our queendom? How do we privilege the cycle of youth learning these things from elders and elders learning these things from youth? What stories are embodied in the movement of our elder women? What stories are embodied in the physical relationships between women? How do we unpack our stories, our oral histories through movement?



## Prompts to Generate Material

- Story Circle Prompt: How are you taking care of yourself?
- Name a fear, name a hope; where does it live/manifest in your body?
- Spring time prompt:
  - I cultivate and nourish...
  - Where/from whom did you learn to cultivate & nourish this?
- Go outside & take deep breaths. Take a photo. Create a movement phrase based on your photo. Share.
- From "The Audre Lorde Questionnaire to Oneself." Respond in movement:
  - What are the words you do not have yet? [Or, "for what do you not have words, yet?"]
  - What do you need to say? [List as many things as necessary]
  - "What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?" [List as many as necessary today. Then write a new list tomorrow. And the day after.]
  - If we have been "socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition", ask yourself: "What's the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?"\* [So, answer this today. And every day.]

## Sharing our archives

- inspired by [Joy Out of Fire exhibition by Firelei Báez](#)
  - "Be an archivist at home! Explore your home and think about what objects you would add to this collection. Write or draw them." Select one to share with the group.
  - Upon return: Share an object from your home, tell a story about your object and/or why it would go in your archive
- Locate an object that holds you accountable to your ancestors.
- Bring a small gift to celebrate your accountability partner to exchange during performance.



## Interview a Femme Elder in your Lineage

This can be a family member, a play auntie, or someone in your creative lineage. Femme is expansive on purpose; the person does not have to identify as woman. Elder is also loose language; interview someone who is of an older generation. This could be the age of your parents, grandparents or great grandparents. Here are some general guidelines:

- [Ask permission!](#)
- Use [PURPLE questions](#) as a guide, but don't feel bound by them
- Audio record (at least) - a voice note is fine!
- 30 min (This is a guide, but you are not bound by this time frame).
- Take a photo(s) of them & with them

### Primary or Secondary Sources?

We are most interested in direct interviews and interactions with living elders in your community (primary sources of information), HOWEVER, if you are committed to learning about someone who has transitioned feel free to pull together secondary sources of information to answer your questions. This might include: interviewing other people about them, locating written materials or other artifacts from their lives, locating photos or videos with them in it.

Refer to the [Firelei Baez Guide](#) to brainstorm who you want to interview or what archival materials will help you tell their story.

### Asking Permission

Please ask your elder if they are willing to be interviewed as a part of a creative process that you are participating in. Ask them if it is OK for us to use their voice / image / story to be a part of the work. Let them know that they will be credited and that our work is about honoring and amplifying their story. You can refer to the [Firelei Baez](#) work as an example of a process of creating artistic work from personal herstory/archives. If they want to know more about the work of art we are creating, [feel free to share with them my writing.](#)

### PURPLE Questions

What brings you joy?

Tell me about a time when you felt like royalty.



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What do you want to make/create?

What feels like a miracle in your life?

Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your 25 year old self?

Tell me about a great relationship you have/had with a woman? (friend, family, lover, professional)

What does transition mean for you?

How do you prepare for changes and transitions in your life?



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**In this place where magic stays  
you can let yourself in or out**

**Ntozake Shange**  
*Spell #7*



# Additional Resources & References

## From SLMDances and Collaborators

### READ MORE:

- [SLMDances Website](#)
- [PURPLE homepage](#)
- [\[INTENTION\] + \[VIRTUOSITY\] - A Song to SLMDances 'Purple'](#) - by Candace Thompson-Zachery

### LISTEN:

- [PURPLE](#) poem by Timothy Edwaujonte, music by Noah Jackson and Ebonie Smith

### WATCH:

- [PURPLE: Things Take Time](#) - work in progress solo for veteran performer Dyane Harvey (June 2019)
- [PURPLE: Duets of Care](#) - work in progress for SLMDances collective (April 2019)

### ORAL HISTORY:

- [The Great Day Interview Questions](#)
- [The Great Day Interview Transcripts](#)



Elder community members with SLMDances at the American Museum of Natural History, April 2019. Credit: SLMDances



## From Our Research

### ARTWORK

- [Joy Out of Fire by Firelei Báez](#)
- *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*, The Public Theater Revival 2019
- *Black Power!* exhibition on view at the [Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture](#) through December 2017.

### BOOKS

- *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* edited by Alice Walker
- *In Love and Trouble* by Alice Walker
- *Help, Thanks, Wow* by Anne Lamott
- *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* by Ntozake Shange
- *Sassafras, Cyprus & Indigo* by Ntozake Shange
- *Spell #7: A theater piece in two acts* by Ntozake Shange
- *lost in language and sound* by Ntozake Shange
- *Wild Beauty* by Ntozake Shange
- *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler
- *The Body Is Not An Apology* by Sonya Renee Taylor
- *How to Sit* by Thich Nhat Hanh
- *Barracoon* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

### ARTICLES

- [That Transformative Dark Thing](#) by Alexis Gumbs in *The New Inquiry*, May 19, 2015
- [Recipes and Wisdom from the Late, Great Ntozake Shange](#) via Literary Hub
- [How to be friends with another woman](#) by Roxane Gay (excerpt from *Bad Feminist*)
- [...and the cosmos](#) by Maria Bauman-Morales in *Dancing While Black: Black Bodies | White Boxes*, the Angela's Pulse inaugural digital journal
- [A Black Legacy, Wrapped Up in Fur](#) by Jasmine Sanders in *The New York Times*, Jan. 31, 2019
- [Write up on Black Power! exhibition](#) on view in the Main Exhibition Hall of the Schomburg Center until December 2017



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- [Write up on Joy Out of Fire exhibition](#) by Firelei Báez at the Schomburg Center until November 2018
- [Gladys Bentley Was The Gender Nonconforming, Lesbian Superstar Of The Harlem Renaissance](#) by Lynn Peril in BUST Magazine, October/November 2016
- [In handing down furs, black women continue a rich tradition](#) by Lolly Bowean in the Chicago Tribune, December 26, 2018
- [The Joy of Being a Woman in Her 70s](#) by Mary Pipher, in The New York Times, January 12, 2019
- [Reparations for Black People Should Include Rest](#) by Janine Francois in Vice, January 8 2019
- [These Artists Want Black People to Sleep](#) by Sarah Burke in Vice, January 7, 2019
- [50 Years After Stonewall, Miss Major Is Still Leading the Trans Revolution](#) by Janet Mock In Out Magazine, February 12, 2019
- [The Strained Relationship Between Black Mothers And Their Daughters](#) by Arah Iloabugichukwu in MadameNoire, May 29, 2018
- [To deal with intergenerational Black trauma, we must care for our elders](#) by Amber Butts in Black Youth Project, October 8, 2018
- [The Audre Lorde Questionnaire to Oneself](#)

## RESOURCES

- [The Laundromat Project- Community and Neighborhood Mapping: A Participatory Process for Generating Interactive Arts Experiences](#)
- Ntozake Shange Archive Collection, Barnard College

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

- [Ping Chong + Company Summer Institute](#)
- Interview Techniques, Community Engagement, Trauma Informed Facilitation, Asset Mapping with [Kirya Traber](#)
- Devising Theater Techniques with Danielle Davenport
- Storytelling & Oral History with [Bridget Bartolini](#)
- Community Engagement in Practice with [Kendra Ross](#)
- Tending the Hearth: Herbs + Rituals for Immunity by sára abduallah, [earth seed holistic](#)
- Financial Wellness by [Denae Hannah](#) (AKA Debt-free Denae)



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**MAY THE SPIRITS BLESS YOU.**

**Ntozake Shange**

*Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*