

Last night was our annual “Dance Happens Here” concert. The culminating program of our 20th anniversary year, it included premieres of great percussive dance: new and challenging work by local artists who are deeply engaged in shaping vital vernacular art forms. The two featured groups, Flamenco del Encuentro and tap artists Germaine Ingram and Ensemble, have pushed themselves to find their own places, voices, and sounds while respecting and remaining responsible to very particular great traditions (and teachers). On stage, they were spectacular and inspiring; the pairing helped people to hear and see them differently and better. Such occasional concerts are one strand of PFP’s work. We work in partnerships to create times and spaces where people can be fully who they are, speaking, dancing, and playing in artistic languages that allow deep histories to be fully present. And we invest in people’s capacity to sustain such processes.

There is nothing like the magic of great art happening in public: people can be transformed through such moments. And these highly visible events get attention, building public knowledge of diverse forms of great, culturally meaningful art happening here and now. But behind these events stands something even more significant: what these events and genres allow, the relationships and knowledge they build, the new pathways and possibilities they open.

This issue of our magazine directs you to some of these behind-the-scenes matters. Three artists included in these pages—Anna Rubio, Antonia Arias, and Fatu Gayflor—have been featured in earlier Folklore Project concerts. Anna and Antonia were part of the December “Dance Happens Here” concert just mentioned. Fatu was one of the artists performing in our

“African Song / New Contexts” concert last spring; Ruth Stone’s essay was first presented in an artist salon this fall, part of an effort to contextualize that concert.

Anna, Antonia, and Fatu can be seen again in our current documentary photography exhibition, “All That We Do: Contemporary Women, Traditional Arts.” James Wasserman’s photographs invite you to look more closely at some women in our region who retain a commitment to folk and traditional arts, truly against all odds. We invite you to look again because we believe that these artists and these vernacular traditions require—and repay—close attention. Arts and artists like these often seem to hide in plain sight, an advantage when they carry dangerous or minority perspectives, but a disadvantage when they are overlooked and dismissed. In the labels for Wasserman’s photographs, the artists’ own words begin to suggest some of the values, motivations, challenges and struggles that are part of the particular kinds of art-making in which they are engaged.

Musicians Adeeb Refela, and Seku Neblett, also featured in this issue, have been participants in PFP’s technical assistance (TA) program, which has served 68 artists in the last three months alone. In gatherings and workshops at PFP, artists share their dreams and visions, their needs and issues. They consider how to explain who they are and what they do. And they are coached in the necessary work of finding the material resources to realize their dreams. Over the last 20 years, more than 368 traditional artists and cultural workers have participated in this free program, raising more than \$2.73 million dollars for locally based folk and traditional arts projects. Often these have been the first outside dollars to be invested in cultural heritage

programs in particular communities of color. Ideas and common projects first mentioned at our TA workshops are often early steps on a road to highly visible public programs, staged under PFP’s umbrella or independently.

For 20 years we have used our long-running programs—public events, technical assistance, arts education, this magazine and other documentary projects—to help keep local vernacular traditions accessible and sustainable. We continue to be inspired by the seriousness of purpose of local artists working in discrete cultural forms, by the power and continuing relevance of “minority” traditions, and by the lively presence and significance of diverse alternative artistic legacies in our neighborhoods. We are privileged to be on this road together.

— *Debora Kodish*
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