

FRIEZE

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In five performances staged this month by Stephen Petronio's Bloodlines/Bloodlines(future) initiative at Danspace Project in New York, sound was estranged and incongruous. Scores eschewed differences between music and sound as bodies themselves upended and winked at expectations of dancing in time. The noises – at times inaudible – created by these dancers as they moved through space made the relationship between sound and time visible and porous by their alternating synchronicity and discordance. Stephen Petronio Company's reconstruction of Steve Paxton's *Jag Vill Gärna Telefonera* (I Would Like to Make a Phone Call, 1964/1982) is presented without a musical score. Two bodies are dressed in pants and t-shirts, one striped. Boyish and athletic, they play, jump, skip and spar. The absence of noise here – of the sounds you'd imagine populating a schoolyard – feels central to the performance, lending both asceticism and irony to the play. Paxton's dancers are pithy and austere, yet whimsical. The concise slapping of hands and bodies is tongue-in-cheek. The emergence of a sound reminds you of its absence. It catches you off guard as much as it fulfils your expectations. There is a joke that refuses to be explained as the dancers depart as quickly as they were stirred up.



Johnnie Cruise Mercer, *Process Memoir 7 (Vol. 8): Back to Love*, 2022. Photograph: Julie Lemberger

Our expectations of sound continue to be confounded in Petronio's own latest work, *Re New New Prayer for Now* (2022). The pad of a foot landing on the ground or its slither across it, a noiseless body springing into the air before immediately being held and secured, reminds the audience that dance is just as concerned with sound as it is with movement. Here, seven performers move in and out of frame, coming together then falling apart. Black spandex sit high on their waists as they arch into contortions. At times, their bodies are birdlike and pointed. As

much as it's tempting to string these images into a narrative, meaning is divorced from semantic coherence. It occurs in each moment, rather than only in the compilation of these moments. Although these bodies are not uncannily out of sync with sound, like dubbed voices with actors' mouths, space nonetheless cracks open between what is expected and what is. The audience can forget that bodies make sound because of the way these dancers tease its correspondence with movement. The remaining three works further elaborate upon the question of rhythm and sound. Davalois Fearon's *Finding Herstory* (2021) begins with something (paradoxically) unexpected: dance to the beat. As Fearon twerks and steps, she reminds you of that other side of dance: synchronicity with sound. This is also the first time that the audience begins to make its own sounds – shouts, hollers, claps and snaps. The delineation of the performance is blurred and the fact of its living-ness accentuated. The outstretched robe and headpiece haunting the altar of St. Mark's Church (home to Danspace Project) which Fearon alternately inhabits and sheds further stresses the work's temporality: it is reaching forward as much as it is reaching back.



Davalois Fearon, *Finding Herstory*, 2021. Photograph: Julie Lemberger

The employment of audience participation and voice in Johnnie Cruise Mercer's *Process Memoir 7 (Vol. 8): Back to Love* (2022) likewise speaks to the relationship between sound and time. Aptly referring to the monologue that prefaces his performance as a 'sermon', Mercer uses his voice to populate the church. Here the emphasis is not on sound created by movement, but on sound that is created without it: for much of the performance, Mercer looks and reads from his laptop. His voice changes and so do props, but it isn't until he asks for volunteers from the audience to dance with him to Beyoncé's 'Love on Top' (2011) that movement and voice come together. More so than in any other performance, Mercer renders 'process' visible. While it ostensibly ends, the performance feels purposefully unfinished and haunted by perpetual revision and reinvention. Mercer's process, the audience feels, will never end.



ÜflyMothership (Tendayi Kuumba and Greg Purnell), *The Adventures of Mr. Left Brain and Ms. Right*, 2022. Photograph: Julie Lemberger

In *The Adventures of Mr. Left Brain and Ms. Right* (2022) by ÜflyMothership (Tendayi Kuumba and Greg Purnell), a collage of videos blur boundaries of reality, hyperreality and unreality. 1990s instructional videos of the brain and preteen YouTube uploads contrast videos through gun sights, dark oceans and comic book caricatures of Mr. Left Brain and Ms. Right. It feels dystopic, militaristic and galactic. Kuumba and Purnell begin the performance faceless, a red swirl of fabric hiding her face and a VR-set masking his. They are distinctly separate with their backs turned to each other, between two worlds or portals. Kuumba and Purnell enact what's projected as much as it seems they create it or become it. The performance moves toward union as the dancers eventually unshed their faces and touch their bodies together – the screen goes static. Here, unlike in previous performances, a story and message are apparent. Incongruity is created not by the estrangement of sound and movement – that is, by form – but rather by content. Whether we find that more compelling is the question.