

# INSIDE

PIONEER WINTER COLLECTIVE

# DJ APOLLO





Image Credit: Peter Nieblas

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# introduction

This document was created as a resource for *DJ Apollo* audiences who wish to learn more about the creation of the show.

The work of Pioneer Winter Collective is meant to be enjoyed and appreciated by everyone, whether you attend many performances or this is your first. No expertise or prior knowledge is expected or required -- just your openness and attention. That said, we are eager to share information about our process with anyone who is curious.

We hope that this material enhances your enjoyment of *DJ Apollo*.

Jeremy Stoller  
Resident Dramaturg  
*December 2023*

# The Team

## Director / Choreographer

Pioneer Winter

## Performers

Clarence Brooks, Christopher Scott  
Caldwell, Frank Campisano,  
Octavio Campos

## Dramaturg

Jeremy Stoller

## Playwright

Juan C. Sanchez

## Sound Designer / Composer

Juraj Kojš

## Advisor

Ron Headrick

## Company Manager

Gladys Ramirez

## with contributions from

Adora, Sean Erwin, Fabian Medina,  
David Palmer, DJ SmeeJay



# About the Company

Pioneer Winter Collective (est. 2016) is a Miami-based, intergenerational and physically integrated dance-theater company, rooted in social practice and community, queer visibility and beauty beyond the mainstream; available for engagement activities and residencies, workshops, performances - both virtual and live. Described as avant-garde, experimental, fearless, and as diverse as Miami itself, the Collective democratizes performance through unexpected bodies in unexpected places, producing unexpected social change - powerful stories and voices that transform the cultural landscape.

A major objective continues to be expanding the definition of all that dance is and can be so that all bodies survive, thrive, and are witnessed in spite of constant erasure based upon race, body type, age, and ability - this goes for both the artists as well as the audience. The Collective does not separate its art making from its community engagement practice, so all activities are interwoven to support our mission of democratizing dance; and actively addresses social justice and equity by bringing real bodies and lived experience to the forefront. The heart of this work resides in dissolving barriers, and we are believers in the beauty of vulnerability and humanness.

**Pioneer Winter, Choreographer + Artistic Director**  
+1 786 925 8292  
[info@pioneerwinter.com](mailto:info@pioneerwinter.com)

**Press Inquiries**  
+1 786 925 8292  
[info@pioneerwinter.com](mailto:info@pioneerwinter.com)  
[production@pioneerwinter.com](mailto:production@pioneerwinter.com)

Follow us on social media, or check out our work online!  
[pioneerwinter.com](http://pioneerwinter.com)



## About Pioneer Winter

Pioneer (b. 1987; he/they) is a Miami-based choreographer and artistic director of the Pioneer Winter Collective, a dance-theater company that aims to democratize performance and transform the cultural landscape through movement that exposes beauty beyond the mainstream.

Recognized in Dance Magazine's 25 to Watch, Pioneer continues to expand the definition of all that dance is and can be, conjuring a world where all bodies - onstage and in the audience - survive, thrive, and are witnessed, no matter their race, body type, age, and ability.

Working across media from stage to film, and in a variety of movement and performance forms, Pioneer facilitates a collaborative process that centers social practice, community engagement, and queer methodologies. Pioneer has been commissioned by the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, Miami Theater Center, Karen Peterson and Dancers, Tigertail Productions, Live Arts Miami, Jacksonville Dance Theatre, and FundArte. Pioneer Winter's work is supported by local, state, and foundation grants, fellowships, and residencies.

Currently, Pioneer is the Arsht Center's first Artist-in-Residence in over a decade. An extension of their creative practice, Pioneer has curated and directed ScreenDance Miami Festival since 2017, presented by the Miami Light Project; Pioneer's own films screen internationally. Pioneer earned an MPH Public Health and Epidemiology from Florida International University's Stempel College of Public Health in 2009, and MFA Choreography from Jacksonville University/White Oak in 2016.

Pioneer is an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Honors College and College of Communication, Architecture + The Arts at Florida International University.





Image Credit: Peter Nieblas

## About *DJ Apollo*

Drawing inspiration from the myths of Apollo, George Balanchine's *Apollo* ballet, and the god-like power of a disc jockey perched high above a dance club, *DJ Apollo* is the newest work in development with Pioneer Winter Collective, set to premiere in April 2025. Balanchine staged a visit between a young Apollo and three Muses; we are uniting a young queer dancer with three queer elders, to explore who and how we worship in the queer community, the memories that lift and haunt us, and the lessons which we have the power to share or have yet to learn. Interweaving decades of queer musical anthems, Stravinsky's score to the *Apollo* ballet, and spoken text generated from the biographies of the performers and their mentors, *DJ Apollo* is a powerful intergenerational reckoning with the wisdom and innocence, strength and fragility, physical and spiritual beauty we contain as individuals and as a community.

# Pioneer Winter

## CHOREOGRAPHER + ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

### CHOREOGRAPHER'S NOTE

*DJ Apollo* comes from a deep desire to explore the complex dynamics of intergenerational community, mentorship, and the ever-evolving landscape of the queer experience. A biomythography that uses dance-theater as its foothold, it delves into the intersection of personal history, cultural memory, and mythology.

We entered into the project considering an aging Apollo, DJing in a leather bar in the 1980s, with three gay go-go dancers age 50+. In our first residency, however, it became apparent that a leather bar may be limiting; we also added the role of a younger male dancer. I came to understand that the entire cast was Apollo - different iterations or fragments - but Apollo nonetheless. How will the three elder Apollos find, convince, nurture, and empower a new Apollo to ascend?

What's remained consistent is the notion of intergenerational community and mentorship - knowing how important mentorship has been in my own life, I wanted to explore the concept onstage, with some of the artists who have been and continue to be *my* mentors.

At a moment of considering my place among generations - this and another piece in development, *Godmother*, honor and celebrate the generosity of the parental and educator figures who helped me grow, while also exploring the complexity of those relationships.

There's also the tension of wanting to preserve history and memory for the wisdom and warmth and light they contain, but also being aware that there are parts of our history that are harmful, or no longer serve us. We invite you to reflect on your own experiences, connections, and relationships, recognizing the ways in which our stories intersect with your own.

The creative process behind *DJ Apollo* has been a remarkable adventure. I have the honor of collaborating with an exceptionally talented team of artists - dancers, designers, and storytellers. Looking ahead, *DJ Apollo* is more than a single production - it's a chapter in an ongoing artistic journey. We aspire to take this work beyond Miami, to tour it, to engage with communities, and to inspire dialogue and celebration.

-- Pi



# CONTEXT: THE MYTH OF APOLLO

# WHAT IS A MYTH?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines myth as

“a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon”

Ancient history scholar Philip Matyszak writes that, more than simply being entertaining stories, myths

“describe the ancients’ view of the world”

which, in the case of the Ancient Greeks and Romans (from whom we derive the myth of Apollo) suggested

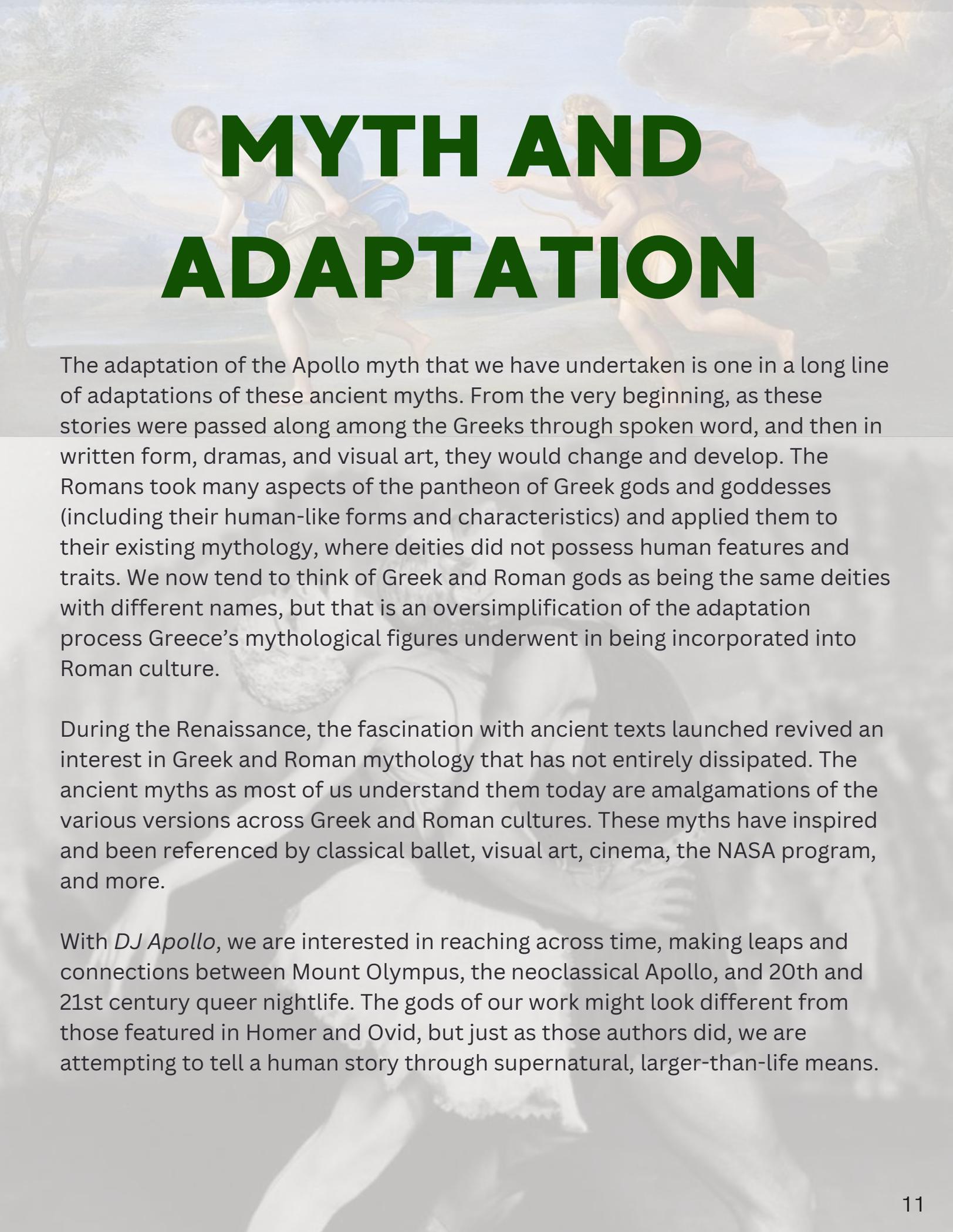
“that, for all their conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings, gods, demigods and humans stand together against the monsters and giants which represent the forces of disorder and wanton destruction. While modern tales are often about the triumph of good over evil, the ancient struggle was that of civilization and rationality contending with barbarism and chaos. Ultimately, the myths are about bringing human values to an arbitrary and unfriendly universe.”

# WHO IS APOLLO?

“In many ways Apollo is the most human of the gods, being both gifted and unfortunate, civilized yet capable of dark barbarism. The multiple sides of Apollo are also seen in his godly portfolio, which encompasses diverse aspects.”

-- Philip Matyszak

Apollo is the son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother of Artemis, father of Asclepius, lover of women and men, known for his beauty. He is the god of music (credited with creating string music, and often depicted with a lyre), dance, and poetry. And archery. And truth and prophecy (he is the patron deity of the Delphi Oracle). The god, also, of healing and diseases, purification, the sun and light, and more. He protected farmers' herds and crops, and oversaw the education and development of children. He is seen as a helper, but when angered, could punish humans by inflicting disease.



# MYTH AND ADAPTATION

The adaptation of the Apollo myth that we have undertaken is one in a long line of adaptations of these ancient myths. From the very beginning, as these stories were passed along among the Greeks through spoken word, and then in written form, dramas, and visual art, they would change and develop. The Romans took many aspects of the pantheon of Greek gods and goddesses (including their human-like forms and characteristics) and applied them to their existing mythology, where deities did not possess human features and traits. We now tend to think of Greek and Roman gods as being the same deities with different names, but that is an oversimplification of the adaptation process Greece's mythological figures underwent in being incorporated into Roman culture.

During the Renaissance, the fascination with ancient texts launched revived an interest in Greek and Roman mythology that has not entirely dissipated. The ancient myths as most of us understand them today are amalgamations of the various versions across Greek and Roman cultures. These myths have inspired and been referenced by classical ballet, visual art, cinema, the NASA program, and more.

With *DJ Apollo*, we are interested in reaching across time, making leaps and connections between Mount Olympus, the neoclassical Apollo, and 20th and 21st century queer nightlife. The gods of our work might look different from those featured in Homer and Ovid, but just as those authors did, we are attempting to tell a human story through supernatural, larger-than-life means.

# George Balanchine's Apollo ballet (1928)

This is how The George Balanchine Trust describes his adaptation of the Apollo myth:

The ballet depicts Apollo, the young god of music, who is visited and instructed by three Muses, who were also children of Zeus and thus his half-sisters: Calliope, Muse of poetry, whose symbol is a tablet; Polyhymnia, Muse of mime, whose symbol is a mask that represents the power of gesture; and Terpsichore, Muse of dance and song, whose symbol is a lyre. Stravinsky, who possessed a strong interest in Greek mythology, conceived of and composed the score as a ballet. It was with this work, his second ballet set to the music of Stravinsky, that Balanchine, at age 24, achieved international recognition and began his lifelong partnership with the composer.

## SUGGESTED WATCH LIST

- 2016 Balanchine Foundation interview with Jacques d'Amboise, who danced the role of Apollo multiple times in the 1950s and 1960s:

[youtube.com/watch?v=rvNpSQJxQ20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvNpSQJxQ20)

- 3 different versions of the *Apollo* prologue, from 1951, 1960, and the 1970s:

[youtube.com/watch?v=6BQfEuKhcZA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BQfEuKhcZA)

- a full recording of the 1960 d'Amboise-led *Apollo*, filmed for Canadian Broadcasting Company's *The Concert Hour* program:

[youtube.com/watch?v=WFJRt1DVa0I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFJRt1DVa0I)

# exploring the production



the what and the when

# timeline

## SEPTEMBER 2022

Residency hosted at Adrienne Arsht Center.

## OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022

Monthly Zoom conversations with collaborators and guests.

## LATE FEBRUARY-EARLY MARCH 2023

Residency hosted at Inkub8.

## NOVEMBER 2023

Weekly rehearsals with the cast.

## DECEMBER 2023

Residency hosted at Miami Light Project, with first public sharing.

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## JANUARY 2024

In-process excerpts presented at the annual Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP) Conference in NYC.

## FEBRUARY-MARCH 2024

Weekly rehearsals with the cast.

## APRIL 2024

Residency hosted at Atlantic Center for the Arts (New Smyrna Beach).

## APRIL 2025

World premiere.

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# exploring the production

perspectives from the cast and creative team



Image Credit: Peter Nieblas

# TEXT

*Miami-based playwright Juan C. Sanchez was brought into the process to help craft the narrative of this dance-theater piece. He discusses below what his role is as a writer on a project that does not include extensive dialogue.*

“I’m helping to create a very open-ended structure, with guideposts inspired by the personal memories that the performers and creative team have shared. By putting them in a specific sequence, those memories have become the building blocks of a larger story. And I’m in the rehearsal room a lot, so that if there’s a moment when some form of communication other than movement is required, I’m available to support that.

The work that I’ve done before, even the devised theater projects, has involved a lot of text. While this piece utilizes minimal dialogue, the story is still being told, very powerfully.

I love putting myself in these creative situations I may not be very familiar with. It’s how you grow. Coming into this, I didn’t know how we were going to work or how it was going to turn out, and that was part of what interested me.”

*-- Juan C. Sanchez*

# SOUND

Many of the Collective's shows feature entirely original scores, created by Resident Sound Designer Juraj Kojš in collaboration with the company. For *DJ Apollo* we are also incorporating existing music: Stravinsky's score for Balanchine's *Apollo* ballet, and the canon of songs that the LGBTQ+ community has listened, lip synced, and danced to for decades -- which have, in their own way, become modern myths: epic, outsized tales of love, heartbreak, despair, and triumph that reflect how we view the world.

## DARING TO ELIMINATE

On Stravinsky's score for *Apollo*, Jennifer Homans writes:

“Gone were the pulsating, percussive rhythms of [Le] Sacre [du Printemps] or [Les] Noces: Apollon Musagète was scored instead for strings. When Stravinsky played the music for Balanchine in 1928, the choreographer was stunned. He later reflected that Stravinsky's music had taught him that he “could dare not to use everything,” that he too “could eliminate.”

*If you are accessing this document online, you can click on the music titles above to hear Stravinsky's three compositions, and try to put yourself in the position of Balanchine, awed at the stark contrast of Apollon Musagète from Stravinsky's ea earlier wo*

## COMPANY PLAYLIST

We asked our four dancers to tell us the songs they love to dance to and which they most associate with their nightclub experiences. This playlist reflects their responses. Fair warning: it's a 'not safe for work' mix..

[https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0cd6QcftpCLz2qQ2uVxYu9y?si=0563f71bde414f19.](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0cd6QcftpCLz2qQ2uVxYu9y?si=0563f71bde414f19)

# SOUND (cont'd)

## MORE THAN A SOUNDTRACK

“For me, sound in a dance production is incredibly important and yet it is often overlooked and put on the level of a soundtrack. We are striving for the depth and richness of sound to be parallel, or complementary to, the visual aspects of the project. Sound is there to be a partner in crime. Our decisions are driven by the storytelling, by really listening to the performers themselves, and from there deciding the best sonic tool. The tempo, the curvature, the temporalities of the music, need to reflect the choreography. We look for the interaction moments, where we want to create alignment or tension with the sound.”

-- *Juraj Kojš* (from an interview conducted in 2021 for the world premiere of Pioneer Winter Collective's *Birds of Paradise*)

# PRODUCTION DESIGN

This early in the process, there is a lot we do not know about the production design. We have been exploring ways to incorporate still images and video from the performers' personal archives, specifically pertaining to their dance careers and nightlife experiences. The goal is for there to be layers of time and memory, of live performance, projection, music, and text creating a rich and transporting experience.

# PERFORMER PERSPECTIVE

# Clarence Brooks

## STARTING OUT

Moving/dancing has been a long-time expression for me. I have been a trained dancer for 42 years and a self-taught mover/improvisor for at least twelve years before that. My mother loved to dance, and my father was not a dancer, so she would grab one of the four children as her partner. We watched TV shows like *The Soul Train*, *American Bandstand*, *Solid Gold*, and variety shows. After imitating what I saw, I created and performed my own versions at parties my parents hosted.

## ON SAYING 'YES' TO DJ APOLLO

I was a fan of the company, and of Pi's leadership. And over the years he has afforded me opportunities to create my own work [through two cycles of PWC's Grass Stains initiative]. So when he offered me the role of Apollo, it felt like the least I could do to support his vision, when he had showed so much willingness to support me.

## ON LEARNING FROM QUEER ELDERS

You often observe a certain rawness in their self-expression -- their demeanor, their colloquialisms, their crassness, their bravado -- all of these things edify me, and inspire me to be more authentic as a queer person.

The stories that they're telling you offer some visual of what was going on at a time that might predate you but in an environment that might be very familiar to you. And that's valuable to me. I use that information like research and I apply it to my instrument - which is my body and my voice - to create images for *others* to witness, which might then inform them on an experience.

**Christopher  
Scott Caldwell**  
PERFORMER PERSPECTIVE



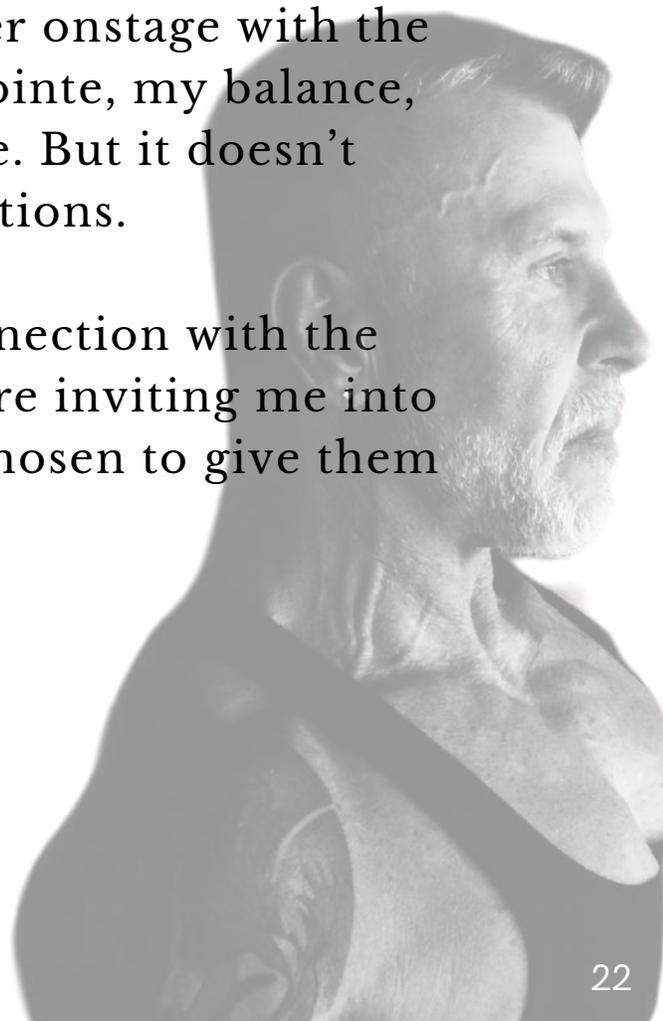
## PERFORMER PERSPECTIVE

# Frank Campisano

I'm a classically-trained dancer. I'm a performing artist. I also sometimes work as a gogo dancer in a gay leather bar. But I don't just stand and grind on a box. I get to wear these amazing harnesses, cod pieces, ritualistic costumes. Even though what I do is sensual and erotic, I still perform. I still have an audience. I'm still being invited to set the pace for whatever's happening in the room. For my work with Pioneer, I can pull from that gogo dance work and my classical ballet training.

At times I've been the oldest dancer onstage with the Collective. My pointe, my demi-pointe, my balance, my turns are not as they used to be. But it doesn't mean I can't convey the same emotions.

For me, performing is about a connection with the audience. I want to feel like they are inviting me into what they want, that I have been chosen to give them something.



When I started dancing at 19, it didn't feel like I was making anything – it just felt like I was learning and practicing. And then when I started being more of a co-author in dance theater works, it felt more epic, important - like my stories were instrumental to the choreography. As I got older, I kept having to be vulnerable and raw and open, to share stories of my struggle, my pain, my trauma, my joy. It didn't feel so special anymore.

The hard thing now is, how do I get inspired to want to bring that stuff out so it still feels important? I have to get back to the reason for making it. It can't just be about dancing. I took on this project in particular because of its exploration of intergenerational relationships in the queer community. I look around at my generation of gay men – we are getting older, living longer; HIV/AIDS meds are better. And there are not that many options for older people, especially if they don't have money. If you've lived the life of an artist, it's pretty scary. How are we going to live? This piece is helping me look at my community – the queer community, starting off with elders and reaching to the younger – and see how I can support them, through creating experiences that speak to them.

# Octavio Campos

## PERFORMER PERSPECTIVE





# ACTIVITIES

# discussion

Attending a performance will often prompt a strong immediate reaction, which you may not have words for. We tend to process art through emotions before we can articulate those feelings. Here are some strategies for exploring your own and others' responses through conversation.

- Start by simply describing the performance. In the most direct way possible, state what happened. How did the piece start? How did it end? What took place along the way? Take into account the location, design elements, music, style(s) of movement, the ways the performers interacted with each other and with the audience.
- Consider your responses to the performance, as a whole and to specific moments you remember. Different aspects of the piece may have elicited very different feelings in you, so your response may not be easy to sum up into a single cohesive expression.

# discussion (cont'd)

- What might the creators of *DJ Apollo* been trying to achieve? Consider everything you've articulated from the questions above. Maybe take another look at the choreographer's note. What sort of intended effect, impact, or message might be indicated by this? If there were moments you found emotional, challenging, or exciting, how might those responses have been in line with or at odds to the creators' intent?
- How well do you feel the performance achieved the goals it set out for itself? And in what ways are these goals meaningful to you personally, or to our culture today?
- What questions would you ask the creators if you had the opportunity?



Image Credit: Peter Nieblas

# movement

These prompts are adapted from exercises used by the Pioneer Winter Collective to generate choreography.

**Personal → Shared**

*materials: sticky notes, writing utensils*

1. based on a prompt of your choice ('the most surprising thing to happen to you this week,' 'a formative moment in your childhood', 'the moment you first discovered your love of dance'), write a memory on a sticky note
2. everyone should adhere their sticky note to the floor, and read the rest of the group's memories.
3. select a sticky note memory that intrigues you, and add on to it -- the next moment in the story; another detail. Repeat this several times.
4. Turn these narratives into movement. You can select one of them, or divide the group to each take on a different one.

# movement (cont'd)

## Experimenting with Composition and Objects

*materials: a large quantity of stackable objects (blocks, cardboard boxes, styrofoam, etc.)*

1. have participants create 3 different scenes using the objects: a wedding, a funeral, and a 3rd scene of their choice
2. invite the students to create short films using their phone cameras, to reveal the scenic environment in an intentional way
3. have the students view each other's films and respond (verbally and/or in writing) about what they see. What story are they intuiting? what is the relationship to the objects?
4. invite each creator to write about the feedback they received -- what pleased or surprised them? How might they change or build on their scene/film given the feedback?

# movement (cont'd)

## Flow, Order, Relationship, Motif

*materials: white board, markers, music-playing device*

1. ask the group: what is a symbol? what are some examples of symbols you encounter regularly? what do symbols mean to us? why do we use symbols in our communication?
2. divide into 2 groups, separated by a white board; put on some music; take 10 minutes to have each person write or draw something on the board, inspired by the music and/or by the preceding writings/drawings
3. rotate the board 180 degrees, have each group devise ensemble choreography inspired by the words and drawings of the other group

(take a pause)

4. have each group build on the existing movement vocabulary, considering: Flow, Order, Relationships, Motif (FORM).

# COMING UP | PIONEER WINTER COLLECTIVE

In 2022, PWC launched its **Creative Connections** resident artist program. We are now coming up on its 3rd cycle. Through Creative Connections, 3-5 Collective members receive:

- a stipend to support their overall contributions to the PWC artistic community (separate from rehearsal/performance labor)
- budgetary and administrative support to enact a project (performance, class or series of classes, panel discussion, community gathering, film, etc.) in service of the Collective and which furthers their own artistic and professional growth.

Current and Past Creative Connections Artists:

Clarence Brooks	Junior Domingos
Frank Campisano	Josue Garcia
Gabriela Cruz	Niurca Márquez
Aeon De La Cruz	Barbara Meulener

Creative Connections projects thus far have included: classes in ballet, capoeira, and contemporary dance; short dance films; live and online facilitated conversations; and community gatherings. All of these projects are open to the public, and you can learn more about joining us for them by signing up for our email list or following us on social media. Visit [pioneerwinter.com](http://pioneerwinter.com) for more information.



**For more about Pioneer Winter Collective,  
visit [pioneerwinter.com](http://pioneerwinter.com).**

Image credit: Peter Nieblas