

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Image: Jenn Freeman

In Celebration of the E-newsletter

by **Ellen Chenoweth**

Our inboxes are overflowing. Sometimes I picture myself on a beach, each incoming email another wave that washes around me. I fantasize about out-of-office auto-responses like, “Ellen cannot answer your email, now or ever. She has moved to a cabin in the woods with no internet and can only accept handwritten letters.” I fervently unsubscribe from e-newsletters in an attempt to keep from drowning in the waves.

As a result of this inbox-cleaning mania, I've developed a love for the artist newsletters that make me laugh or think or help me feel connected. As more people ditch their Facebook accounts over privacy or other concerns, or become more constrained in what they say online, emailed newsletters provide a way of staying in touch while also retaining more intimacy than social media. Sending a newsletter seems a little sweetly archaic and old-school, rather than a shiny new thing.

Mailchimp reports that our open rate for emails in the arts is among the highest of all industries, [at 26%](#). Who are some dance artists sending emails that are worth your time not just to open, but actually read? The following are some of the artists who provide a small jolt of excitement when they come ashore in my inbox.

[Joanna Rotkin](#)

I have never met this dance artist in Colorado, but I adore and admire her just based on her weekly emails. Her subject lines are tiny, attention-grabbing beauties of their own, with “honey. honey. moon. moon.” one week and “there are no words” or “B-School?” the next. Full of anecdotes from all parts of her life and with gorgeous images as well, the emails often end with a “dance mission” for the reader. It could be to “to listen to the world that is inside of your body and the world that is outside of your body, and to go forth from there” or “to continue to gather with those you know deeply, and those that you don't. Talk or don't talk, but connect, and make eye contact, hold hands as need be, and keep moving forward.”

[Annie Wilson](#)

I wish this one came more often, but when it does, the reward is like an art-making diary entry. What does it take to make a dance? What doubts plague the artist? What's the scariest thing about being alive? Exquisitely readable, Annie's email may share "5 things about this piece that terrify me," written in advance of the premiere of *At Home with the Humorless Bastard*, or some functions of art, such as "it can allow us to get in touch with our individual and collective demons and feed them milk and honey." More please.

[Miguel Gutierrez](#)

Miguel's voice comes through loud and clear in these blasts, which he calls SPEWSLETTERS, and not just because of the use of bold colors or all caps. A recent fundraising appeal assured readers, "Your support will go directly into making more work possible and that is a promise because I ain't Marina promising to make a building with your dough and then 'Oops I didn't really have a development plan for the 31 million dollar compound I just kick started.' I am just an obsessive person who is happiest/most organized/able-to-cope-with-the-shitshow when I'm doing art things with others." The SPEWSLETTER provides insight into the maker and the work.

[Alex Tatarsky](#)

I sought out Alex's newsletter after I couldn't get the basics of her shows from her intriguing but also opaque Instagram posts. I have not been disappointed. As with my other favorites, if I can't get to their wildly original performance work in person, the e-newsletter provides a small portion of their voice in a different format to tide me over. After plugging a show at LaMaMa, Tatarsky discussed her post-show plans, "Possible after-party//discussion (?) in my childhood bedroom if we all wish to continue the evening of vulnerability, humiliation, and flashes of joy (g-d willing, regarding that last one)."

[Anna Martine Whitehead](#)

Chicago-based artist Anna Martine Whitehead somehow tells me about events that I haven't heard about anywhere else and does it in a voice that feels like we are engaged in a deep, private conversation. I feel lucky to get her emails. She also penned my favorite out-of-office, lowering- email-expectations auto-response, complete with beautiful shade at the close: "I am currently finishing the old semester, preparing for the new one, and otherwise hibernating with loved ones and myself for the winter. I will be *very slow* to answer emails between December 8 and December 14. *I will not check email at all* between December 15 and the new year. Please know your correspondence is important to me—almost as important as my self-care."

[Jenn Freeman/Po'Chop](#)

Jenn Freeman's Brown Pages emails are the reason I haven't yet moved to a cabin in the woods with no internet. To call the Brown Pages a newsletter is understating the facts; they are more like emailed works of art and poetry, set within a playful digital playground. If you have an inbox, I can't recommend these gorgeous gems highly enough. The imagery! The interactivity! The sheer amount of thoughtful wisdom on the world! They must take hours and hours to craft, but you can receive these gifts for free.

Dance writers have also been exploring e-newsletters, with two writers just launching theirs in the last couple of weeks—[Sima Belmar](#) sending dispatches from the West Coast and New York Times critic [Siobhan Burke](#) from the East. [Benedict Nguyen](#) started up last fall, less focused on dance so far, but still irresistible if you like taco gifs. Of course I recommend subscribing to thINKingDANCE's newsletter to make sure you're catching all of our commentary and new articles.

The common elements for my personal favorites highlight that I'm a fan of vulnerability, color, language that hasn't been institutionalized, and missives that give the sense of knowing the artist better than before. It's a high bar, but in a time where so many things are competing for our attention in so many different ways, I'm grateful for attempts to connect that feel substantial and authentic.

By Ellen Chenoweth
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