

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: April Rose

Time Transforming Truth

by Miryam Coppersmith

[Theatre Philadelphia](#) and [thINKingDANCE](#) continue our partnership, begun in 2018, bringing coverage and new perspectives to Philadelphia's vibrant theatre scene.

"Ben!"

The ensemble clusters around Benjamin Camp — one with a hand on his shoulder, some farther off, Rachel Camp smushing up against him back to back. I join other audience members giggling.

"They're laughing because those two are siblings," Shavon Norris clues the rest of the audience in.

"Makoto!"

The whole ensemble rushes into a tight circle around Makoto Hirano, everyone's right shoulder yearning to make contact. We laugh again, learning that Makoto is the one member of this new ensemble who is personally close to everyone else.

Driving this introduction game, and indeed the entire performance, is Shavon Norris, Guest Director of *Sincerity Project #4 (2021): Cyclones, Schools, and Packs*, the fourth installment of Team Sunshine's 24-year performance project, investigating how time affects the performers in its ensemble. Under Shavon's direction, short scenes and simple physical structures took us on an embodied journey, bearing witness to the last two years. In [my review for Sincerity Project #3](#) (2019), I struggled with the specificity of the stories the performers told, and whether the audience could see ourselves in them. Since then, we've been through a collective trauma together (apart). I felt that solidarity, though *Sincerity Project #4* never smoothed over the ways in which race, gender, class, age, and many other factors made each person's experience of the pandemic (and life) unique.

Shavon is Black; the original Team Sunshine ensemble consists of Makoto, an Asian artist, and five white artists. At the beginning of the show, Team Sunshine's creative director Alex Torra stood at one end of the long meetinghouse, explaining how he invited Shavon to guest direct this iteration of the project. Shavon had questions about who in the ensemble would have detailed knowledge of her experience and perspective, as a Black woman, as Shavon. So she brought in Megan Quinn, Marcie Mamura, and Danielle Currica.

The ensembles merged.

The performers chose others in the ensemble to help show what it felt like to be in their bodies over the past two years. Ben had Makoto stand alone in the center of the space and clench every muscle in his body, slowly bearing down towards the earth. Iris McCloughan had Mel Krodman drag them, limp, across the floor. I felt each of these moments in my body's memories of the past two years.

Telling each others' stories also worked powerfully through words. Megan, Danielle, Rachel, and Marcie stood at the top of a set of choir risers (a callback to the empty theater seats present in earlier versions) and told us about Makoto's experience early in the pandemic. He stood with his back to us, receiving their words about how no one reached out to him, his questions about whether he had done this to himself, never asking for help, always doing the work to adapt and take care of himself in white spaces. Throughout this painful story, the others held him with eye contact and voices full of care — it felt like seeing people uncover an open wound in order to clean it and bandage it up again.

When he turned to the audience, Makoto vibrated with the energy just given him. He explained that they had rehearsed this section four or five times and it had gone from nearly unbearable to a welcome moment. His relief was palpable. Throughout the performance, the use of the body and the holding of each others' stories allowed for more than just telling or reliving them. I witnessed transformations within the performers and felt invited to be part of them.

Shavon was at the center, always grounded and responsive to the moment. She caught our eyes playfully, acknowledging us, the performers, even the creaking of the pipes. She took to the top of the risers. Arms pulling up towards the sky, she told us about feeling herself slipping down her body into her own heel and having to pull herself back up again and again during the pandemic. Her whole body danced that tension, weight, and slippage. My body felt it, in the space together with her body.

It is fascinating to witness the Sincerity Project change — watching artists set up structures to investigate time passing, and then time changing their lives and the world so much that they have to transform how they document their own transformations. *Sincerity Project #4* didn't feel like a departure from the first three, but the continuation of a Big-Bang-like expansion. I'm planning to be there for the next transformation and the next and the next.

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To see our reviews of past iterations of The Sincerity Project, follow these links:

[Honestly Sincere](#); The Sincerity Project #3 (2019), reviewed by Miryam Coppersmith

[?The Naked Truth](#); The Sincerity Project #2 (2016), reviewed by Whitney Weinstein

[The Sincerity Project #4 \(2021\): Cyclones, Schools, and Packs](#), Team Sunshine and Shavon Norris, Arch Street Meeting House,

December 8–12.

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