

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Paula Court

Steve Paxton (1939–2024) from the tD Archive

by Emilee Lord

Postmodern dance lost a great one on February 21st. [Steve Paxton](#), collaborating founder of [Contact Improvisation](#) and a key player in postmodern dance, leaves behind him a profound legacy of physical exploration. He was great in multiple senses of the word but also thoughtful, generous, inventive, ingenious, collaborative, and watchful. To some, he was a teacher, an inspiration. To others, a co-conspirator, a friend.

In 2017, I went to *Tea for Three*, an evening of improvisation, interaction, and text with Steve Paxton, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer. In one part of the piece that has stayed with me very vividly for these past years, Paxton began to read a section of his book *Gravity* while slowly, almost imperceptibly, melting onto his back on the floor. It was a singularly gentle and authoritative gesture that describes his work in some simple way. For modern dance overall, his spine will still ripple through us for a long time.

thINKingDANCE would like to take a moment to honor his work by pulling from our archives.

Firstly, [a piece by Lisa Kraus](#) on *Steve Paxton: Selected Works*, Dia:Beacon, in 2014.

“What creates the ‘authority’ that Paxton has? Is this the result of an august history? Or is there something in Paxton and his performers’ own straightforward conviction that gives depth and credibility to everything they do?”

In 2018, Megan Bridge and Beau Hancock [wrote an article on](#) reconstructing the improvised dance *PA RT* that Paxton and Lisa Nelson toured from 1978 to 2002.

“How do you navigate a performance landscape that is built on the felt experience and idiosyncratic choices of its makers?”

From the [2020 book review by Andrew Sargus Klein](#) of Paxton's *Gravity*:

"Gravity is a fragmented and lyrical rumination on its central theme: gravity and the human relationship to it."

And again in 2020, in [part 2 of a series](#) remembering Nancy Stark Smith by Jonathan Stein, Paxton's words ring out by way of introduction.

"But this isn't about me. It's about we."

And finally, in a letter to the editor, Paxton himself on [Bob Ashley](#).

(In response to an article by Megan Bridge found [here](#).)

Our hearts are with his community and family far and wide as we remember and honor a leader in our field.

By Emilee Lord

February 29, 2024