

# thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Screen shot: idiosynCrazy productions

## A Year in the Life: idiosynCrazy's One Year Vlog Project

by Lisa Kraus

With self-produced YouTube stars uploading video weblogs (vlogs) from their bedrooms, it's a no-brainer that a smart dance company would pull out their phones or laptops and make a vlog, too. The technical expectations for such content are modest; the field wide open. If you google "vlog" and "dance" you can be treated to "[Lady Gaga Judas Dance Vlog 1](#)" which, at the 8 minute 24 second mark, shows a lanky woman and platinum blond guy giggling their way through a semi-remembered rendition of Gaga choreography (17,945 hits). Or on Funk'd Up TV you can get a [Dance Gestures tutorial](#) (427 hits). Or you can settle in with all 35 episodes (to date) of idiosynCrazy productions' One Year Vlog Project.

Jumatatu Poe welcomed viewers to the series last January with a cheerful "Happy New Year," explaining that the project will show the life of idiosynCrazy over the course of a year, with one installment each week, and with special focus on work leading up to the premiere of *Private Places* in the 2012 Live Arts Festival. Even though in some episodes there is static sitting-in-front-of-the-laptop chatting, it's balanced with great dance footage from rehearsals and performances. Much of the series was expertly edited (and at times shot) by Les Rivera, whose sound/image combinations are a treat and whose title sequence wakes you right up.

Central to the year's story is the relationship of idiosynCrazy (headed by Poe, Shannon Murphy and Shavon Norris) to J-Sette, the punchy, saucy dance form that's at the heart of *Private Places*' choreography. J-Sette originated in the 1970s at Jackson State University when the majorettes decided to do their routines sans batons and spread initially to other historically black Southern Colleges. Poe described finding La Kendrick Davis and Jermone Donte Beacham, two terrific proponents of today's J-Sette, on YouTube, making contact and then beginning an extended working relationship. Both men appear in various installments of the vlog. We see them teach class, show their own dazzling moves in unison with their squad or in a bit of open space in someone's apartment.

J-Sette is the name for the women's version of the style, for men it's called Bucking. When J-Sette is done by men, there's an emphasis

on gender bending, with guys adopting what might be seen as more typically feminine movement. Davis says “the goal is to imitate the females. Some clubs go as far as looking like they’re in drag, in shorts and sports bras. For our costumes, we may have an outfit called ‘cotton candy’.”

Beacham says about the form: “My only rule is making sure everything is sharp.” And regarding the performer’s commitment, he says: “When you do it, just own it.”

Some wonderful montages of rehearsal catch the Philadelphia dancers wrestling with the challenge of mastering the J-Sette-based choreography. In other episodes, students at Swarthmore College led by idiosynCrazy take on a John Cage score, participants in a class for LGBTQ youth at the William Way Center jump into J-Sette and, in Pittsburgh, the company members interact with a group of former flight attendants (the ‘service industry’ in general and flight attendants in particular are another focus of *Private Places*).

Showing the life of a dance company wouldn’t be complete without some attention to the administrative side, so it’s interesting to hear Kilian Kröll\* speaking about his role as a coach helping the group restructure and drive the organization as effectively as they do the art-making.

With each vlog episode clocking in at around three minutes, you could spend what would amount to a feature film’s length catching up with idiosynCrazy productions’ One Year Vlog Project—and it’d be time well spent.

idiosynCrazy productions, One Year Vlog Project, <http://vimeo.com/channels/ideosyncrazy>.

*Private Places* idiosynCrazy productions, Sept. 15, 18 and 20 at 8pm, Sept. 16 at 4pm and Sept. 19 at 9pm, 18-20, 919 N 5th St.

Mini-Ball *We Just Gon’ Buck*, Friday, Sept. 14, 7–10 pm, Church of the Advocate, 1801 West Diamond Street

Privatizing and Publicizing Gender: An Intimate Dialogue into *Private Places*, Sept. 15 at 3pm, Live Arts Studio, 919 North 5th Street.

<http://livearts-fringe.ticketleap.com/private-places/>

\* Kilian Kröll writes for thINKingDANCE

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