Ishmael Houston-Jones and Miguel Gutierrez

Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and other works by John Bernd

WHEN:
FRIDAY, MAY 4 & SATURDAY, MAY 5
8:00 PM

VENUE:
BING CONCERT HALL STUDIO

Photo: Ian Douglas
Program

Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and other works by John Bernd

Conceived by Ishmael Houston-Jones
Co-directed by Ishmael Houston-Jones and Miguel Gutierrez
Choreography by John Bernd

Compositions by John Bernd, arranged and re-mixed by Nick Hallett with additional songs:

Just Be Good To Me, performed by The S.O.S Band, written by James Harris III, Terry Lewis
Dirty Mind, written and performed by Prince
Age of Consent, performed by New Order, written by Bernard Sumner, Peter Hook, Stephen Morris, Gillian Gilbert
Street Hassle, written and performed by Lou Reed

Consultation by Jennifer Monson • Lights by Carol Mullins
Drawings by John Bernd • Video Design by Alvaro Gonzalez

Performed by Toni Carlson, Talya Epstein, Alvaro Gonzalez, Charles Gowin, Madison Krekel, Johnnie Cruise Mercer, and Alex Rodabaugh.

Production Manager: Sarah Lurie

Dance, music, text and visual imagery drawn from the following pieces by John Bernd

Surviving Love and Death, 1982
Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life, Part One, 1982
Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life, Part Two, 1983
Avant Garde a Go Go, 1984
Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life, Part Three, 1985
Be Good To Me, 1985
Monkey Go West, 1985
Two on the Loose, 1988

Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and other works by John Bernd is a collage of choreography and music John Bernd (1953–1988) created during the last seven years of his life.

About the Program

Sally

This should be it. Maybe the piece of writing I did yesterday I’ve enclosed, and that really says it all. In rehearsal, a wonderful, blessed, and lucky time. When all of a sudden I thought that it was possible, all the ideas, all my life, of fitting in, that I could see it as possible. And I was speaking and I was moving and I was singing and I was dancing and I started laughing at one point. Just started laughing. And I wrote:

I am either going crazy
or about to die
or about to be born

—November 6, 1981

From a draft of a letter John wrote to Sally Banes (It’s unknown if this letter was sent or not.)

Welcome to an experiment in reconstruction; a remembering and reimagining of the work of John Bernd.

From the late ‘70s throughout the ‘80s to his untimely death at the age of 35 in 1988, John Bernd relentlessly created a body of work that was singular in its vision and force. From reading his words it is clear that his
drive was a combination of careerist ambition and spiritual mission. He was a key figure of the East Village scene and was one of the first artists to deal openly with gay themes. He worked inter-disciplinarily, and with an extraordinary array of dance artists who would go on to make some of the most interesting work in New York.

In order to do a true reconstruction of John Bernd’s work we would need a time machine to bring you back to the way the East Village looked, sounded and smelled in the ‘80s. Before 2nd Ave Deli became Chase Bank. Before the Tunnel Bar became a hardware store and the Saint Mark’s Baths became a video store and now a Karaoke Bar. Back to when the raw and immediate aesthetic of the work of that time was fed by the weekly Open Movement sessions at PS122, where John Bernd met Ishmael Houston-Jones, Yvonne Meier, Fred Holland, Stephanie Skura and Jennifer Monson. Where they all danced together and influenced each other and fell in love and made shows together. And most importantly, we would need to bring you to that imperiled time when people died one after the other in the plague era of AIDS in New York City and friends became each other’s patient advocates and caregivers.

There are so many pieces we could have made. John Bernd’s work ranged from unison phrases rooted in his modern dance studies to wild improvisations performed by the very best of the era. He filled his pieces with ebullient physicality, evocative tableaus and performance art gestures of healing and cleansing. Certain material persisted from piece to piece. The projections of his line drawings, which increasingly became fixated on the image of a temple, made their way into several pieces. The triplet stomping was a recurring movement motif, his personal folk dance. And then of course the small red chair, which appears in almost all of his pieces. As he wrote in a letter to Sally Banes “At home. That’s where it begins. At home, you’re sitting in your chair just sitting.”

Drawing on the influence of his mentor Meredith Monk, whom he worked and performed with in the late ‘70s, he composed music and sang his plaintive songs and wrote passionately and drew obsessively and danced, danced, danced. He loved to dance. And he was compelled to make his work. In some cases he performed just days out of the hospital. He swept floors at PS122 in the early mornings so that he could get free rehearsal space. In his last piece Two On the Loose he tells a story of trying to get rehearsal space in the hospital so that he can work on the piece with Jennifer Monson: “I kept looking for a place I could rehearse. That just always became my project. It still is my project.” He was planning new projects and strategizing potential tours right up until he died.

We have created a reimagining of Bernd’s work. By taking sections of different pieces and putting them together in new ways, we want to highlight the range of what he made and what he was interested in as well as create a contemporary reflection on his work based on our relationships to it. Ishmael danced in all three parts of Bernd’s Lost and Found series and shared a friendship with him. Miguel only learned about Bernd’s work through this process and was shocked to discover such a direct ancestor to the elements and concerns in his own work. Nick has taken John’s music and brought it into conversation with today.

We strongly encourage you to research Bernd’s work. Please go to the Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center and look up the documentation that exists. Please read the ‘zine—reprinted in the Lost and Found catalogue—that his friends put together ten years after his death. Please continue to seek out the work of other artists and ancestors whose names never entered the canon. There is more work to be done.

Thank you
Miguel Gutierrez and
Ishmael Houston-Jones
**Biographies**

**John Bernd** (1953–1988) was an interdisciplinary artist working with original text, music, vocal work, projections, choreography and improvisation. He was one of the first persons with AIDS in the Downtown Dance scene, was a “Bessie” Award-winning choreographer, performer, and “ethical guiding light.” He presented his first evening-length work, *A Personal Landscape*, in 1978 and continued to create solo and group projects for the next ten years including *Surviving Love and Death, Lost and Found (scenes from a life), Be Good To Me*, and many others. He performed his work in a variety of contexts and venues, such as PS 122, Danspace Project, Dance Theater Workshop, Theater am Turm in Frankfurt, Tangente in Montreal, as well as The Pyramid Club and Club 57 in New York. He collaborated with Tim Miller on a yearlong autobiographical duet called *Live Boys*. He received fellowship support from New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts. He performed and toured with Meredith Monk/The House, and performed in New York with Jeff Weiss, Jane Comfort, Melissa Fenley, DANCENOISE, Anne Bogart, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Fred Holland. According to his resume: “I go to the beach or movies, read books, take naps—whenever possible.” He died in New York on August 28, 1988 of AIDS-related complications, at the age of 35.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones** is choreographer, author, performer, teacher, and curator. His improvised dance and text work has been performed in New York, across the U.S., and in Europe, Canada, Australia, and Latin America. Drawn to collaborations as a way to move beyond boundaries and the known, Houston-Jones celebrates the political aspect of cooperation. He and Fred Holland shared a New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award for *Cowboys, Dreams and Ladders*, which reintroduced the erased narrative of the Black cowboy back into the mythology of the American west. He was awarded his second “Bessie” Award for the 2010 revival of *THEM*, his 1985/86 collaboration with writer Dennis Cooper and composer Chris Cochrane. In 2017 he received a third “Bessie” for *Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and other Works by John Bernd*. Houston-Jones curated Platform 2012: Parallels which focused on choreographers from the African diaspora and postmodernism and co-curated with Will Rawls Platform 2016: Lost & Found, dance, New York, HIV/AIDS, then and now. He has received a 2016 Herb Alpert, a 2015 Doris Duke Impact and a 2013 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Artists Awards.

**Miguel Gutierrez** lives in Brooklyn, NY. He creates dance-based performances, music, and poetry that focus on desire, identity, and the search for meaning. His work has been presented in over 60 cities around the world in venues such as at Centre National de Danse, Centre Pompidou, ImPulsTanz, Fringe Arts, Walker Art Center, TBA/PICA, MCA Chicago, New York Live Arts, Live Arts Bard, American Realness, and the 2014 Whitney Biennial. He has received support from Creative Capital, MAP, National Dance Project, Jerome Foundation, New York Foundation for the Arts and the Tides Foundation. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and United States Artists, and an award from Foundation for Contemporary Art. He is a 2016 Doris Duke Artist and he has received four New York Dance and Performance Bessie Awards. His recent work includes a commission for Ballet de Lorraine in Nancy, France, called *Cela nous concerne tous (This concerns all of us)*, which was inspired by the French social unrest of May 1968. He has created music for several of his works, for choreographer Antonio Ramos, and in collaboration...
with Colin Self for Jen Rosenblit and Simone Aughterson's *Everything Fits In The Room*. He leads a music project called *Sadonna*: sad versions of Madonna songs. He invented (and recently killed) DEEP AEROBICS and he is a Feldenkrais Method practitioner. He is the program director for Landing, an educational initiative at Gibney Dance Center. His book *When You Rise Up* is available from 53rd State Press. His new project, *This Bridge Called My Ass*, will premiere in 2019. www.miguelgutierrez.org.

**Jennifer Monson** met John Bernd in 1982. He was performing at an exhibit of performance artists at Sarah Lawrence College curated by Tony Whitfield. She danced with John until his death, performing in PS 122 Benefits, *Be Good to Me* (1985) and *Two on The Loose* (1988).

**Carol Mullins** first designed lighting at Danspace Project for Andy deGroat in 1978. She designed there for Part 1 and Part 3 of John Bernd’s *Lost and Found* in 1982 and 1985. In 1982 she designed for Ishmael Houston-Jones’ curation of *Parallels* and for parts of his 2012 platform with the same name. She has also designed for some of his Danspace dances. She has received three Bessie Awards and an OBIE for her lighting.
Nick Hallett is a Brooklyn-based composer, vocalist, and cultural producer working between the worlds of sound, art, and performance. His music has been presented in New York at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Whitney Museum, MoMA, New Museum, Ecstatic Music Festival, Hayden Planetarium, Town Hall, Performa, The Kitchen, Roulette, National Sawdust, The Public Theater/Joe’s Pub, and Le Poisson Rouge, among others. Between 2014 and 2017, Hallett composed five scores for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, including its Analogy Trilogy, which he continues to tour with the company as vocalist, instrumentalist, and music director. His first opera, co-authored with artist Shana Moulton, Whishing Pines 10 (2010), toured museums and performance festivals across the US, and was recently adapted for the internet—www.whishingpines10.com. Hallett is the music director of the Joshua Light Show and co-directs the Darmstadt new music series. He has a new opera in development, titled To Music.

www.gutcity.com

PERFORMERS

Toni Carlson is a dancer and performer based in New York City. She has appeared in the work of Yanira Castro, Sarah A.O Rosner, Lance Gries, and Ming Wong, as well as her own. They love dancing with friends, and would like to thank Ishmael, Miguel, Will, and Ben for this opportunity.

Alvaro Gonzalez Dupuy is a Chilean Dance Artist based in Brooklyn. He holds a Bachelor degree in Dance with a concentration in Performance and Pedagogy (based in Laban/Leeder Technique) from the Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano (Chile). In Chile, he performed for Patricio Bunster, Sergio Valenzuela, Isabel Croxatto, Christophe Haleb, among others. He has produced and performed at Triple-Pack Producciones. He was teacher for movement expression at Universidad de Santiago de Chile, and NIMIKU Art Space for contemporary dance. He was performer at Danza en Cruz Company and at different festivals in Chile, Mexico and Bolivia. In his arrival to NYC, he was student at Dance New Amsterdam, performed for Indie Ballet Collaborative, Proyect.eli Imagery, Martita Abril, Mei Yamanaka, Not For ReTale, and was administrative intern for Stephen Petronio Company. He currently performs for Antonio Ramos, Elizabeth Motley and experiments in NYC as a dance artist through his own performance signature “EstadoFlotante.”

Talya Epstein is a Bessie–nominated performer, originally from Massachusetts and currently living in Brooklyn. Past and present collaborators include Anna Azrieli, Miguel Gutierrez, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Nikima Jagudajev, Isabel Lewis, Juliana May, Phoebe Osborne, Will Rawls, Melinda Ring, Tatyana Tenenbaum, & Larissa Velez-Jackson. She attended Impulstanz as a 2017 danceWEB scholar. Her own creative projects have been supported by the New England Foundation for the Arts’ RDDI special projects grant, Movement Research at the Judson Church, Danspace Project’s Draftwork series, AUNTS, Dixon Place, CPR, and The Bushwick Starr. She is a Taurus-Gemini, Libra rising, with a moon in Gemini.

Charles Gowin is a mover from Columbia, Missouri. He received a BFA in Dance from the University of Illinois in 2015. Since moving to Brooklyn, he has had the pleasure of dancing for Katy Pyle’s Ballez in Sleeping Beauty and the Beast and Slavic Goddesses, Brendan Fernandes and Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and other works by John Bernd with Ishmael Houston-Jones and Miguel Gutierrez.

Sarah Lurie is a New York-based lighting designer and manager whose work has been seen around the city. Recent works include design at the Barrow Group, La Mama, and various New York University venues. Sarah is an alumna of New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts.
Madison Krekel is a multidisciplinary artist and performer, originally from Oakland, CA. Now living in Brooklyn since 2010, she has performed works by John Bernd with Ishmael Houston-Jones and Miguel Gutierrez, Katy Pyle’s Ballez, Young Jean Lee’s Theater Company, and was a long time performer with Third Rail Projects’ shows Then She Fell and The Grand Paradise, among others. When not performing, she teaches youth ballet at BAX, and rocks regularly around NYC with her punk band, SNATCH ATTACK. Honored for the chance to grow deeper with my castmates and tour this work as John would have wanted. For you, friend.

Johnnie Cruise Mercer is a native of Richmond, Virginia and a BFA graduate from Virginia Commonwealth University’s Department of Dance and Choreography. As a performance artist, Mr. Mercer has professionally collaborated with Antonio Brown, Edisa Weeks w/Delirious Dances, Monstah Black, Yon Tande (Whitney Hunter), and Andre Zachery w/Renegade Performance Group. He is also a current company member of Dance Theater X led by Charles O. Anderson based in Austin, TX. As a choreographer Mr. Mercer’s work has presented at the Center for Performance Research, Bronx Academy of Arts and
Dance (BAAD!), The Dance Place, Brooklyn Arts Exchange (BAX), Gibney Dance: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, Dogtown Dance Theater, and at festivals throughout the region. Mr. Mercer, the artistic director of TheRED-projectNYC, is a 2016-17 Harkness Dance Center Artist in Residence. www.trpnyc.com

Alex Rodabaugh is a dancer, choreographer, and performer. He has worked with artists such as Doug LeCours, Craig u.v. Cady, Sigrid Lauren, and Miguel Gutierrez as well as horsewomen such as Buffalo Bailey Williams. He has shown work at Center for Performance Research, The Ho_se, Total Rejects Live, Glasshouse, Movement Research at Judson Church, Draftworks at Danspace, PRELUDE, Gibney Dance Center, Mount Tremper Arts and American Realness. He is the recipient of Gibney’s 2015 boo-koo grant, 2015 DanceWEB scholarship and is a co-host on the Talking Movement podcast. His work can be found at www.alexrodabaugh.work.