



PHOTO: RACHEL NEVILLE/ART BY: AARON LAZANSKY "SPACECRAFT"

RENEGADE

PERFORMANCE GROUP



ANDRÉ M. ZACHERY

André Zachery hails from Chicago's South Side from a family of African-American and Haitian descent. He cites the Afrofuturism movement as one of the leading influences in his artistic practice. Having created works of his own since the early 2000's and with the collective Wildcat!, he formed Renegade Performance Group (RPG) in Brooklyn in 2007. André has developed a highly idiosyncratic practice, inspired by African diasporic practices, contemporary urban forms and innovations in technology. He eschews Eurocentric performing arts traditions, pioneering the integration of the principles of the Afrofuturism movement. He combines choreography, performance, music, film, and new media in a highly collaborative manner to fashion cross-media pieces that are total works of art. His artistic investigations are shaped by his experience of being Black in America. Issues of social justice and gender equity found in the work are rooted in the desire to reclaim the Black body along with the ideas and aesthetics drawn from the margins of mainstream culture.

As a movement artist, André developed his original technique labeled Physical Propulsion, a training method of engaging the body through space using floor, standing and aerial techniques rooted in sacro-cranial alignment and awareness. Physical Propulsion is based on modalities from Flying Low technique, codified by David Zambrano, Laban, Limón, and Capoeira.

As a filmmaker and technologist, Zachery has been a creative lead on collaborative teams ranging from theatre works, films, operas and music videos. His design work in production has been shown and reviewed at New York venues such as Clemente Soto Velez, Harlem Stage, The Met Breuer, 3-Legged Dog Art & Technology Center, Judson Church, Mabou Mines at Performance Space New York, and for Marc Jacobs Fashion Week Book Launch 2015. As a filmmaker he has edited feature music videos for Grammy Award-winning artist Kendra Foster, has had films screened for the Haiti Film Festival of Haiti Cultural Exchange,

The Luminal Theater, Weeksville Heritage Center and Earthdance Festival. In New York City, his work with RPG and other collectives has been presented at the Brooklyn Museum, Irondale Center, JACK, Prelude Festival, Harlem Stage, 3-Legged Dog Art & Technology Center, and many other venues. Recently, his projects have been shown in the US also in Chicago and Atlanta as well as internationally. He was a 2015-17 Jerome Foundation Artist-in-Residence at Movement Research, and a recipient of the 2016 NYFA Gregory Millard Fellowship in Choreography. He also was an artist-in-residence at the School of Dance at Florida State University and a guest faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. André's scholarly work has been presented during conferences at Duke University, Brooklyn College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has curated performance platforms and artists' panels at Danspace Project and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York.



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

As an interdisciplinary artist, I investigate the presence of the Black body as a medium of political and artistic expression through performance and technology. Diverse influences and lineages converge in my cross-media work, which I find to be most closely aligned with the tenets of the Afrofuturism movement, currently brought to international attention of the American mainstream by pop-culture phenomena such as *The Black Panther*.

My practice seeks to emancipate the principles of Afrofuturism in the realm of the performing arts, where it has not taken root to the extent it has in literature, music and visual arts. The movement focuses on the role of the artist as a member of a collective body of individuals, seeking equality through activism; that is what I want to put at the center of my practice. My goal as an artist, a scholar, and an activist is to end the marginalization of the Black experience and to restore its prominence as a universal element of our common cultural domain.

I find that movement, in its abstractness, reveals an innate awkwardness, a humor that echoes our vulnerabilities. I also celebrate its power as the means of communicating the self-identification, communal understanding, diaspora lineage, and non-binary empowerment. I strive to connect the unnameable and the verbal by evoking raw, visceral emotions, pushing the envelope of expectations, in particular the definition of art and beauty.

ABOUT RPG

Founded in 2007, **Renegade Performance Group (RPG)** is a Brooklyn-based performing arts collective exploring Black artistic aesthetics and expressions through dance theatre, visual performance, film, and other media. The company was formed as an artistic outlet to foster dialogue compelled by the human experience and considers the local activism and education an important part of its activities, geared towards engaging a new generation of audiences, especially those underrepresented in the mainstream culture.

#beRenegade

Since the company's inception, RPG has received a number of prestigious residencies, awards, and support for its ongoing work from institutions such as the Jerome Foundation, CUNY/Dance Initiative, the Brooklyn Arts Council, Harlem Stage, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the Brooklyn Museum, MoCADA, Danspace Project, The Studio Museum of Harlem, 3LD Art & Technology Center, and The Kennedy Center. Renegade Performance Group is a fiscally sponsored project of Fractured Atlas.

COLLABORATORS



Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste is a Bessie-nominated composer, designer and performer, living and working

in Brooklyn, NY. He holds an MFA from Brooklyn College's Performance and Interactive Media program. His work, through the lens of precarious labor, complicates notions of industry, identity, and environment and the implications of the intersections of such phenomena. He is a founding member of performance collective, Wildcat!, and frequently collaborates with performers and fine artists, including Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, André M. Zachery, and Yanira Castro/ a canary torsi. He has presented at the Brooklyn Museum, Newark Museum, Under The Radar at The Public Theater, The Studio Museum In Harlem, National Sawdust, The Jam Handy (Detroit), Tanz Im August at Hau3 (Berlin), American Realness at Abrons, Knockdown Center, Gibney Dance, FringeArts (Philadelphia), Judson Church, Stoa Cultural Center (Helsinki), MIT, Arts East New York, JACK, Painted Bride Art Center (Philadelphia), University Settlement, Harlem Stage, as well as on Dazed Digital, Complex, and Boiler Room. He was a 2017 Artist-In-Residence at Issue Project Room.

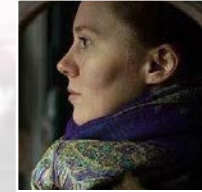
www.jeremytoussaintbaptiste.com



Charles Vincent Burwell is a Congressional Scholar in Leadership, holds a B.S. in Vocal Music Education

from Florida A&M University with emphasis in theater, dance, voice, and ethnomusicology and an MFA in Musical Theatre writing from the Tisch School of the Arts (NYU). He has worked for dance companies and arts organization such as the Lincoln Center Institute, New York's City Center Theater, the Katherine Dunham Institute, Trenton Education Dance Institute (TEDI), National Dance Institute, Urban Bush Women, Festival del Caribe (Santiago de Cuba, Cuba), Ile Aiye (Brazil), Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and Bates Dance Festival. He has composed music for the Cairo Opera House Ballet (Cairo, Egypt), National Dance Institute under the Artistic Direction of Jacques d'Amboise (Shanghai, China) as well as the accompanying HBO documentary *Jacques D'Amboise in China – The Other Side Of The World*. Burwell has sung at New York's Carnegie Hall and maintains a private studio for vocal instruction while continuing his career as a singer, dancer, actor, and composer.

LaMont Hamilton is an autodidact interdisciplinary artist working in New York. He works primarily in photography, moving image, performance and sound. Hamilton has been the recipient of several residencies, fellowships and awards, including the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, MacDowell Colony, MFAH Dora Maar program in Menerbes, France, Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, Artadia Award, ArtMatters Grant, Artist in Residence at Duke University's African and African American Studies, Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, and the City of Chicago's IAP Award.



Joy Havens is a multidisciplinary artist working in the worlds of dance, costume and opera.

Her costume designs for dance and baroque opera include premieres for Renegade Performance Group, Peter Kyle, Elke Rindfleisch, Sarah Weber Gallo, Pappas and Dancers (with Jill Sigman) among others and have been seen across the US and in Europe. As a dancer, she has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, toured India with Thresh/Preeti Vasudevan and appeared on *Great Performances* on PBS. She attended The Ohio State University receiving the Special Projects Fund for Exceptional Creativity.

“Reaching into this rich heritage, Zachery embraces Afrofuturism as a way to understand how Black people have existed, what forces sustain our existence and how it might continue.”

—Eva Yaa Asenteewa, *InfiniteBody*

AFROFUTURISM SERIES

In his seminal 1978 text *The Necessity of Tomorrows*, the science-fiction writer Samuel Delany, recognized as one of the forefathers of literary Afrofuturism, wrote: “We need images of tomorrow, and our people need them more than most.” This philosophy ushered in a generation of creatives such as musicians Alice Coltrane and Sun Ra, writer Octavia Butler, and visual artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Rammellzee. In their work, the influence of the roots of the African-American culture meets the present, marked by the extensive use of contemporary media and strong engagement in the current socio-political issues. Afrofuturism looks towards the future where the Blackness will find its full expression and the rightfully prominent place in the cultural landscape.

The AFROFUTURISM Series, initiated by RPG in 2014, was built from a desire to follow this path and understand how new ideas of Black cultural expression could be manifested through a variety of means: dance, visual media, sound, and conceptual ideologies. It seeks to form a creative space where African-rooted experience is no longer invisible, but fully rendered as a synthesis of communal sharing and practice, evolving across spectrums, domains and dimensions. The works in this series are also united in the desire to illuminate the value of the “low” culture – such as sci-fi or graffiti – in shaping new cultural paradigms.



UNTAMED SPACE

Untamed Space is a quartet for three female and one male dancer, embodying Zachery's contemporary reinterpretation of Black signifiers through the use of technology. Its point of departure is the history of the maroon colonies of the 17th and 18th centuries – the liberated communities of Africans who escaped to hills, mountains, and forests upon their arrival to the Americas. Set in a vivid environment enriched by video projections, **Untamed Space** covers the trajectory of marooning across time and space: starting in Haiti, moving to Mississippi, and,

as Zachery explains, "arriving at my point of departure in Chicago, and into the Afrofuture." Building on a number of dance styles, including contemporary modern technique, house, hip hop dance, and African-American stomping traditions, the piece also uses Zachery's own Physical Propulsion technique.

In this piece, Zachery is particularly invested in reframing the narrative by placing female performers front and center, in defiance of the dominant patriarchal perspective. The work draws

Premiere: 2017 | 70 minutes
Choreography/projection design: André M. Zachery
Music: Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste
Scenic design/costumes: Joy Havens

deep inspiration from the work of visual artists Kerry James Marshall and John T. Biggers, both painters of large canvases, whose imagery focuses on the beauty of the mundane details of African-American life. **Untamed Space** taps into the spiritual dimensions of maroon colonies, considering how the creation of those impassible spaces has influenced contemporary identities of African-blooded people in the Americas.

Untamed Space is comprised of four sections: *Haiti, Mississippi, Chicago* and *Black Space*.

"Zachery's dancers... move as one harmonious organism with a minimalism that compels the audience to reconsider stereotypical expectations of Black dance."

–Deirdre Towers,
DanceEnthusiast

▶ VIDEO
Full work | P: danspace



THE INSCRIPTION PROJECT

The Inscription Project is a media-infused piece for six performers which looks at graffiti art as a manifestation of Afrofuturism. Born in the Black and Latino South Bronx in the 1970s as part of the original hip-hop movement, graffiti has spread globally as a tool of artistic resistance. This piece draws inspiration from the late artist Rammellzee, whose pioneering philosophy of "Gothic Futurism" influenced what would become known as "wildastyle", elevating graffiti-makers into their own artistic canon. One of the focal points of the piece is the irony of how this urban artform – once a symbol of blight and dysfunction – became a tool of gentrification with its mindless cultural appropriation, displacement, and oppression. In *The Inscription Project*, Zachery explores the resilience and honesty of the art struggling to maintain its original message of political empowerment in the changing cultural context.

Premiere: 2015 | 55 mins

Choreographer: André M. Zachery

Music: Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste + Mos Def + Flying Lotus

Sound Arrangement and Design: André M. Zachery

Multimedia + Set Design: André M. Zachery

Visual Images: Aaron Lazansky "Spazecraft"

Lighting Design: JC Moore

Performed by Andre Zachary, Sarah Chien, Steph Lee, Candace Thompson, and Nehemoyia Young

▷ VIDEO
Trailer

"[The Inscription Project] holds within the same confrontational spirit of graffiti and hip hop... that said we had the right to leave our mark on society, determine the spaces we live in, and rewrite our futures; that we will not be silenced because our lives matter."

–Sherese Aker, *Futuristically Ancient*



DAPLINE!

Set in sparse space merely accompanied by the sound generated by the bodies, *Dapline!* looks at the origins and continued practice of “the dap” – the intricate handshake typically exchanged between Black men in the United States. Originating as a sign of camaraderie among the Black troops during the Vietnam War, “DAP” was initially an acronym for dignity and pride but has later been co-opted into popular culture – as well as amongst gang members and professional athletes – through mass media marketing. Using a gestural vocabulary reminiscent of a police pat-down line, a ritual greeting, and, finally, an ancestral dance, *Dapline!* reveals a deeper meaning and origins of the practice: a wordless conversation, a show of support and resistance, and a communal experience that is ever-relevant to the image of Black masculinity in the American culture.


“A powerful dance... communication through touch, a dialect direct in its wordlessness but still rich in emotional nuance and gestural beauty.”

–Brian Seibert, *The New York Times*

Premiere: 2015 | 40 minutes
Created by André M. Zachery and LaMont Hamilton
Performed by Brian Henry, André Cole, Johnnie Mercer, Malcolm McMichael, TJ Rocka James, and Stephen Galberth

▷ VIDEO
Trailer

▷ VIDEO
Full work



“Kick-ass... work that is so much itself that it just carves out its own space... The best rock show I’ve seen in ages.”

—STEW, co-creator of Tony Award-winning musical *Passing Strange*

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

In *Fire on the Mountain*, commissioned by Harlem Stage for the 90th birthday anniversary of James Baldwin, searing social commentary collides with rock-and-roll in a form of an explosive performance conceived and created by André M. Zachery in collaboration with composer Charles Vincent Burwell and sound artists Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste and Jessie Nelson. Titled after two of Baldwin’s best-known books – *Fire Next Time* and *Go Tell It On The Mountain* – the work re-fashions selected Baldwin texts into punk songs. While leaving the writing intact, Zachery’s engagement with the text reveals the poetry’s unexpected dimension, tapping into the disquieting visceral emotion. In his explanation of the origins of the piece, Zachery points out the importance of bringing back the largely forgotten tradition of Black punk rock – represented by artists as Death or Bad Brains – adds to the power of the original text, concerned with intricacies of racial, sexual, and class distinctions in Western societies.

Premiere: 2015 | 15 minutes
Direction/concept: André M. Zachery
Text: James Baldwin
Composer: Charles Vincent Burwell

Vocals: André M. Zachery
Lead Electric: Charles Vincent Burwell
Bass/synth: Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste
Drums: Jessie Nelson

▷ **VIDEO**
Full work

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