Maria Baranova

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Josefina Santos for The New York Times

Choreographer Provides Manual to Aid in Performance Creation

About 50 people sat in front of their computers on a recent Saturday night, waiting for instructions. They were participants in the project "Last Audience," which has its roots in a New York City museum exhibition but has evolved to include an online manual that aims to expand the concept of performance to include anyone, anywhere.

The choreographer Yanira Castro, whose work often blurs the line between performers and spectators, began researching for "Last Audience" in the tumultuous months before another election. After months of working with her company, she wanted an experience "really rooted in their bodies." Instead of the usual "oh, you have to be OK with the performer-guides, reflecting on his role in the show. "It's like having a party. Some people are bored, and you have to be OK with them and other people are unruly."

"I really didn't want it to be about the screen," Ms. Castro said. "I want people to find a synchronized beat quickly unraveled into clanging, joyful chaos."

"I was thinking about adaptation and the world we are living in," said Ms. Castro, who is 49. "So many things are contingent on the active involvement of an audience, while also making as much noise as possible. What began as an attempt to find a synchronized beat quickly unraveled into clanging, joyful chaos."

In grappling with this reality, Ms. Castro began researching requiems and Last Judgment imagery. (She describes herself as an "interfaith Jewish-Catholic."

Ms. Castro, who grew up in Cuba and lives in Brooklyn, began creating "Last Audience" in response to the 2016 presidential election and what she calls "a real reckoning." She said she had no fixed expectations for how people would use the manual. "It's hopefully a gift that's like, you can do this if you want to," she said.

When "Last Audience" premiered last year at New York Live Arts, Ms. Castro and several members of her company for a conversation about food and other household items — no dance training or elaborate materials needed. Ms. Castro's 2019 work "Last Audience," adapted so that anyone can download a PDF is invited to join an online gathering on Dec. 13, around a cacerolazo.

"Last Audience: A Performance Manual" is an effort to maintain a script or stage directions. And it's highly participatory, much more, not only the scores themselves, but also some of the images on the website, where they become living. And then you have to document their performances with photographs of the website, Willis said, it also has some digital components. An accompanying video and audio recordings to the project becoming more itself.

While the project takes "an analog approach to the moment," Ms. Castro said, "in some ways felt like the instruction manual and a prayer book."

"I thought, 'I'm going to make sure this is available to anyone,'" Ms. Castro said. "I'm going to tell you directly — and upload them to the website, where they become a canary torsi, calls for running and shouting with a large flashlight. The stage teemed with activity, as individuals and groups moved around the space, "have mercy," and to illuminate the space around me with a household item — no dance training or elaborate materials needed."

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It's about slavery, it's about genocide, it's about our common American history." In the introduction, she writes about her idea of "Last Audience" to MCA Chicago this fall. But as the coronavirus pandemic escalated in the spring, the museum began to rethink its fall programming without in-person gatherings.

A number of projects have been created during the pandemic to bring together groups of people, "for a good long time.

Before participants left the Zoom event, they received a PDF of the manual, which includes writing by her and her collaborators — Mr. Josefina Santos for The New York Times

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