

Pivoting Through the Lens: Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema's Journey in a (Post) Pandemic World

By Michelle Bernier and Rosely Conz

Abstract:

This article explores how Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema responded to the challenges and possibilities of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these adaptations shaped our plans for a “post-pandemic” world. In 2020, while shifting to virtual formats, the festival launched its first-ever Community Dance Film Project, *This Breath Together*, exploring the theme of resilience through diverse artistic voices. Amid logistical hurdles and safety constraints, the project maintained a strong collaborative spirit. Sans Souci also continued the international reach of its screenings with a fully online Brazilian edition, produced in partnership with Dançaberta Dance Group. Through inclusive screenings, live-translated lectures, and interactive artist panels, Sans Souci Brazil connected artists from all over the world, highlighting the work of Brazilian filmmakers. Locally, the festival embraced hybrid programming, from drive-in screenings in Boulder to academic collaborations and virtual Q&As that brought global perspectives to niche audiences. New film categories and platforms emerged, embracing experimental formats, youth creators, and VR/360 content. As the organization adapted and embraced new modes of producing and distributing screendance, Sans Souci used dance film as a tool for education, connection, and healing, something that continues to drive our efforts five years later. Beyond presenting dance cinema, we strive to serve as a community builder for artists, educators, and audiences worldwide.

Note on authorship

This article was authored by Michelle Bernier and Rosely Conz, with contributions by Heike Salzer and Ana Baer. Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema is a non-profit organization that has been curating and producing screendance events nationally and internationally for the past 21 years. As a highly collaborative organization, we want to acknowledge the additional contributions of our advisory board, board of directors, volunteers, and interns in creating the content of our 2020 season and collecting and organizing the data that informed our writing. We also want to acknowledge the work of Dr. Julia Ziviani Vitiello and her group, Dançaberta Dance Group, in the three editions of Sans Souci Brazil.

Opening

As we sit to write this article in 2024, separated geographically by four different time zones, we look back at the accomplishments and challenges Sans Souci faced in 2020. Amidst a global pandemic, we faced losses – professional and personal ones. Still, we recognize our privilege in being able to continue screening the works of many filmmakers who were (and still are) subjected to the financial, social, and emotional hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. With live performances canceled and dance education moving online, screendance assumed a new place in the dance world. Many dance companies, artists, and higher education dance programs suddenly turned to the medium of screendance to continue sharing their productions.



This essay will look at the changes that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to Sans Souci financially, logistically, and artistically in 2020. We share stories to reflect on the importance of engaging in collaborations and strategies that enhance the diversity of our programming, while also recognizing some of our limitations. We hope that this essay creates space for festivals and artists to ponder about the future of screendance, demonstrating the incredible adaptability of this art form. At the same time, we acknowledge issues of equity, access, inclusivity, and representation in curating, programming, and producing the festival.

History & Curatorial Vision

With an expansive definition of dance and an appreciation for highly experimental and interdisciplinary forms, our festival exposes diverse audiences to a variety of film, video, and performance possibilities. Sans Souci (French for "without concern" or, as we affectionately nicknamed it, "no worries") was conceived in 2003 when Michelle Ellsworth and Brandi Mathis sat on the porch of a 1967 Marlette Mobile home in the Sans Souci Trailer Park in Boulder, Colorado, musing about the pleasures of viewing and creating dances for the screen. Quickly, the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art and the University of Colorado at Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance, as well as artists Ana Baer Carrillo and David Leserman (under the nom de plume Hamel Bloom), added their support to transform mere musing into a full-fledged festival of dance cinema.

From the beginning, Sans Souci was directed by folks of different ages, abilities, ethnicities, and backgrounds, who were coming to dance cinema at different times in their lives for different reasons. Ana Baer Carrillo, an immigrant from Mexico. David Leserman, a Polio survivor who navigated the world in a wheelchair, going back to school after retiring early due to his disability to pursue a second bachelor's degree in dance. This diverse group of artists made Sans Souci a festival that has always kept an extra eye out for films that represent dancers of varying races, genders, and ability levels. Films that teach about being a dancer with a disability, privileging inclusivity and access for viewers with disabilities. That said, what that meant early on was simply booking venues that David could access physically, meaning others could, too. Our efforts have graduated over the years, and now we ask all artists for captioned and audio-described versions of their films, whenever available. We also teach all-abilities dance classes as part of our creative aging program, *Dance is Like a Fine Wine*.

Hence, what was first imagined as an informal gathering of local dance video artists screening their works on the white wall of a trailer is now an international festival with submissions from and screenings worldwide. As the Boulder Daily Camera's Kalene McCort wrote about us, "Since 2003, the Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema has engaged audiences with imaginative films that delight the eye and often border on the surreal... The longstanding event has expanded by spotlighting innovative films from around the globe." (McCort, 2022)

Our revised mission, influenced by our foundation, curators, and collaborators over the years, as well as the events of 2020, aims to provide a space for communities to share an experience of dance cinema, and to elevate the ever-changing nature, culture, and field of dance cinema. We believe that this can be accomplished through enacting policies that move toward a more racially just and socially equitable landscape for dance cinema, and holding ourselves accountable to those standards, to making dance cinema accessible to more audiences, to educate, to entertain, to provoke, to inspire, and to develop appreciation and appetite for the work. We want to give

exposure to artists from all walks of life who are making work within this field, instigating transnational connections between artists and between artists and audiences.

In the past ten years, we've grown in the number of events hosted, submissions received, and films screened. Equally important, we are intentional about the representation of diverse bodies on and off screen, including our board members, curators, and volunteers, as well as in the dance styles represented. We've expanded our programming to include pedagogical initiatives, including workshops and discussions, as well as sharing our work not only in theaters and cinemas, but also in schools, libraries, galleries, museums, drive-ins, and state and national conferences. Overall, we believe in fostering a forum for the evolving conversation between dance and cinema – celebrating both and their potential to cross-pollinate, while providing a quality, professional presentation setting, and taking meticulous care in exhibiting our artists' work. Our latest efforts involve actively programming and promoting diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, age, geography, economic status, experience level, dance forms, film styles, and more – among our audiences, artists, and boards, and among the films we screen.

These efforts are evident in our curatorial guidelines and team. In 2024, we had 8 curators from 4 countries with various interests and expertise, all of whom hold advanced degrees in dance and/or filmmaking, and all of whom make dance films ourselves. Moreover, they all embrace our mission. We respect and value the fact that other festivals have an aesthetic, a particular interest in certain research areas, or an affinity for a certain filmic type or genre of dance. We do not. In fact, our priority has always been to keep the rules loose, intentionally, to let a fantastic new film spark our curiosity and affect the way we program the season. So, what *are* we looking for? We're looking to be moved. We're looking to be intrigued, to be surprised. We're absolute dance cinema fanatics, so among our curatorial team, we have quite a diverse set of interests to pique. From our website's "curatorial criteria" listing:

- "The integration of dance and cinematography is the heart of our work... Cinematic elements must be an integral part of every entry."
 - We say this because we are not, for the most part, looking for simple documentations of good choreography, nor are we looking for a well-made film where the dancing does not contribute meaningfully to the identity of the film. We are constantly asking, "Why does it have to be a film? Why does it have to have the dancing it has to be *this* film it's trying to be?" If we don't find an answer to both of those questions, it does not meet this criterion.
- "When choosing works for exhibition and installation, we consider thoughtful forms and themes, investigative/innovative/experimental approaches, production values, audience appeal, choreographic creativity, virtuosic performance, and program fit. None of these criteria is a must; none is more important than the others; excellence in any one or two areas may be sufficient for acceptance."
 - We do not want to limit or exclude a film that might, for example, have an innovative approach to choreography and simple but effective cinematography, but which also happens to have very low production values. That probably describes a lot of the films we make ourselves. We also want to be inclusive of the films that have a very high production value, and maybe don't concern themselves with virtuosic dancing, but instead prize community dancers of various ages and levels of experience. It's not important to us that each film checks every box; each film must do what it *wants to do* very well. This allows

the films to teach us, and a film that can tell us what it is and teach us something about dance or filmmaking, or life is a film we want to show.

- We encourage submissions from all artists regardless of credentials and affiliations.
 - We know that many artists feel like their one-person crew might not be significant, or perhaps not ‘enough’ for a festival acceptance. In reality, we show one-person-productions every single year. There are so many opportunities in the art world that are limited to folks who have already ‘made it,’ or seen quantifiable success in particular ways. We are interested in everyone, including helping those yet to ‘get there.’

International collaborations have been part of Sans Souci, increasing access to the art of screendance and our access to diverse communities and their work. We are privileged to have as part of our team people who keep international artistic exchanges at the heart of what they do. As a small budget festival, we do not often have the funds to fly in artists from overseas to be present at events, but we do what we can when we can, and after 2020, using mostly online resources, that we learned about during the pandemic, such as artist networking events or lecture presentations on Zoom.

Speaking of budget, Sans Souci is fortunate to have a team of engaged and dedicated volunteers, but our growth in the number of events and initiatives does not necessarily mirror our budget. We have only received a handful of general operating support grants over the years, and some of those no longer exist. We never charged for tickets in the first 10 years or so, fearing it would shrink our audience, but also to keep the financial side of the festival simple. In fact, when the current Executive Director, Michelle Bernier, began volunteering with the festival, it was still not technically even an incorporated organization. It was David Leserman DBA (“doing business as”) Sans Souci Festival, meaning that it was not a registered organization with the state and that it did not have its own bank account. This was all legal and appropriate at the time, but as the festival grew, changes were in order. We briefly became a for-profit corporation, and then a non-profit corporation, to better match the mission, vision, guiding principles, and programmatic work we’d been doing all along. Even after all our growth, though, we are still well under the \$100,000 per year budget benchmark, and we only have one part-time employee, a handful of contractors, and survive mostly on volunteers donating their time, like many nonprofits. When we do receive funding, it’s almost always project-based, meaning that the funds must be spent entirely on one project, leaving us with little capacity to build savings over the years. For those projects, we pay artists and contributors market rates, but we can only produce those kinds of projects when funding is available.

We have worked diligently to multiply and widen our income streams, especially to increase earned income, which includes submission fees, workshop income, ticket sales, screening fees, residency fees, and even changing bank account types to earn more interest on our savings. We believe the arts are a critical asset to society, and we’re grateful that our nonprofit status allows us to continue driving how the arts make their impact on our local community and the broader screendance community. We see a need for both earning our funding and ensuring that our critical presence means the community feels compelled to support the work we do. For us, that has always meant straddling the line between charging enough for submissions that we can pay our bills, but not so much that we make it unaffordable for artists. It has meant relying on community support through grants and donations, and sponsorships, but not so much that we are

overly dependent on them, or too beholden to their influence to stay focused on our mission. We earn our place in the local arts landscape, proudly and wholeheartedly. All this means that we are small and mighty, we stretch every dollar as far as we can, and we try to view that as something that keeps us nimble and able to pivot quickly when the need arises.

And it did in 2020, when the pandemic hit, and we noticed that a significant pillar of our festival is friendship. We honestly wouldn't be here if we weren't a bunch of friends who enjoy doing this together, and who want to support each other in making, collecting, and sharing the work of dance cinema. When Michelle Bernier took over Executive Directorship of the festival from David Leserman, at first, she made as few changes as possible, respecting the legacy David left. At one point, she began signing off on the newsletters, "With Love, Michelle & the SSF Team." In 2018, after he handed over the reins and shortly before he passed away, David brought this up to Michelle, and she was concerned he might say it was too unprofessional, too informal, or just not the right feeling for Sans Souci. Instead, he told Michelle that's how he knew he'd made the right decision. He told her running the festival had always been an act of love, and he knew that he had found a person to keep caring for it, keep taking meticulous care of other people's artwork, and to keep doing this as long as it was fun and something to love. The way we care for each other and for the work was about to become more vital than we ever imagined when the pandemic of 2020 rolled around.

How We Navigated the COVID Pandemic/Programming Study

United States

Prior to our 17th Annual Festival Season in 2020, we typically presented 8-12 screening events in and around Boulder, Colorado, with our screening partners at 2-5 universities and colleges around the United States, and one or two tours internationally, depending on what opportunities were available in a given year. All screenings were live, and all events were in-person -- we had never done an online event until March 2020.

Our call for entries opens in early spring and closes in late spring, allowing us to curate and plan events through the summer for a fall premiere, and then a few additional screenings of the new season's official selections. When we do screenings before the fall premiere, which has been increasing in number for the last few years, we screen films from our archive. For example, if we are offered a screening partnership with a university in the spring semester, we tend to show staff or audience favorites from the previous fall season. This way, many films get a second chance to be in front of an audience, and we can increase the number of screenings and partnerships, without overtaxing our fall season with too many events. This also helps us keep a living archive, rather than simply letting it collect dust. An additional bonus is that we can program films along a theme from various seasons; our first ever Black History Month screening took place in February 2020, featuring films from several prior seasons that celebrated and/or examined the Black experience, and it launched a yearly tradition we have continued and expanded upon with Women's History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month.

The Earliest Days of the Pandemic

As the pandemic began to shut down buildings and programs in early March 2020, it became clear that we should protect our staff and audiences, eliminating in-person events. At the time, we had just completed our first Black History Month Screening in person at Boulder Public

Library and were planning to follow that up with a Women's History Month Screening at the same venue. We were recognizing the underrepresentation of Black creators in the dance film community, and although women as dancers do not struggle with underrepresentation, in roles behind the camera, they do. We recognized that the festival was a platform, and the archive an arsenal, with which we could combat the invisibilizing nature of these disparities.

With enthusiasm, we pivoted the screening to a Facebook Watch Party. This meant writing to each artist for permission to take the work online instead, which inevitably led to a slight shift in the programming and moving forward, despite the drawback that audiences needed to have a Facebook account to watch. While we learned some lessons about the feasibility of that platform and its limits, such as glitches in playback, the attendance at 57 logged-in users was better than expected, and the following Q&A was also well-attended by attentive audience members and filmmakers. Shortly thereafter, we were slated to produce screening partner events with both the Texas State University Department of Theater & Dance, and Metropolitan State University of Denver's Department of Theater & Dance. With a little ingenuity and a lot of eager helpers, we combined these events online, included another Q&A with many artists participating, and converted the intended accompanying lecture called "Why Representation Matters: Diversity and Inclusion in Dance Film" into a prerecorded introduction video for the screening. One major early takeaway from these off-season screenings where we screened past-season films was that our filmmakers and their collaborators were as hungry for these events as our audience, and we were able to accommodate many more artists in these 'virtual face-to-face' activities than we ever would have been able to pre-Covid, due to the costs of travel, lodging, etc. The other major takeaway is that students' ability to connect with artists in Zoom meetings provided a new level of inspiration and connection to their own personal artistic practices.

Around this time, we also started to become concerned that our number of new submissions would be lower than usual. We imagined (based on our own experiences) that artists' financial worries about paying submission fees now would leave them hard-pressed later, not to mention the fact that many artists were immediately let go from their jobs - either as performers or sometimes from their "day-jobs" as well. An unfortunate reality of running a dance film festival is that our artists' submission fees are what keep us alive - we would love to, in a dream world, allow everyone to submit for free and pay screening fees to artists, but it's simply not a fiscal possibility. Even with the support of grants, donations, and ticket sales - all of which were affected by the pandemic - submission fees remain one of our main revenue sources. In the 3 years before the pandemic, submission fees made up anywhere from 25-45% of our total annual revenue. In 2020, we were able to receive some COVID-19 relief grants for arts organizations that lost ticket sales and submission fees. That year, our percentage was closer to 10%, because that's specifically what those grants were designed to supplement. Nowadays, about 15%-20% of our budget comes from submission fees. But the fact is that artists were having a hard time paying submission fees, and reasonably, we would be strapped for the rest of the season if we couldn't make up the difference.

Considering this, we initiated an additional call, adding a category of submission for films that were created in quarantine or while staying 'safer at home,' and charged only \$5 USD for a submission of a film that should be shorter than 2 minutes. Similarly, we offered to accept films that were edited recently, but used older footage from a previous project, simply to encourage artists to utilize the time artistically, and to have hope for a newly created project to indeed see a screening in 2020. The response was overwhelming.. Not only did we find the new crop of films

incredibly diverse and interesting, but we also heard from several artists that the call had worked: many created their piece just for this call, and a few used footage from a prior project. One artist, Sebastian de Buyl, director of *Spectre* (2020, United States and Belgium), commented “I am very grateful for your initiative that gave me strength to go through with this and put a lot of time into recent footage that could have taken dust for years that now suddenly arose from your invitation to make films in such troubled times. It really helped me, and I wanted to thank you for this.”

As we mentioned, the funds collected via submission fees are our annual budget's basis. That said, we are adamant that the submission fee should not create a financial barrier to an artist's entry, and we, as Sans Souci, want to do anything we can to help. As a result, beginning in 2021, we began to offer a limited number of submission fee waivers and discounts to those with financial hardship, particularly prioritizing artists from marginalized backgrounds. Rather than setting our own standards or regulations about what might qualify as financial hardship or marginalization, we ask artists to self-identify and share as much or as little as they would like about how this applies to them. We have had artists explain their hardship or marginalization in relation to race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, economic status, and political situation (including many artists from countries where international sanctions prevent them from sending any money to an American organization like us, literally prohibiting them from submitting without a waiver). We review these applications in a process with a diverse panel made up of volunteers from our advisory board, and we guarantee that even those who are not granted a waiver get at least a discount that equates to paying the early deadline fee (the lowest possible), since we are only able to send the results of the fee application process after the early deadline. In the past five years, we have awarded dozens of full waivers and many more significant discounts on entry fees, and we have heard from many artists that this is the only reason they are able to submit to our festival. Many of these films make it into screenings every year, and several artists request and receive submission support year after year.

Our historical approach as a festival left us asking, if we wouldn't be representative of the changes we wanted to see, who would? The fact that the pandemic disproportionately affected BIPOC artists and arts administrators made us commit to our heritage month screenings (Black History Month, etc.) as annual traditions, rather than one-off instances. We allowed these times to challenge us and to bolster our investment in equitable representation in everything we do.

The Community Dance Film Project

As we emerged into summer, it became clearer that nearly all our programming for the year would have to go virtual. In addition, we were finally wrapping up with pre-production and getting ready to move into the shooting phase of our first-ever grant-funded filmmaking endeavor as a festival, a community dance film project. This funding from the Boulder Arts Commission was granted in early 2020, but the planning process for the film began in 2019. Adjusting to the requirements of the pandemic, we adopted guidelines for safety:

- Instead of shooting groups and companies as planned, we took the project down to solos, and duets that could maintain a physical distance of 6 feet between performers.
- Any indoor shooting locations were replaced with outdoor locations.
- All crew would be required to always wear a mask.
- Dancers were invited to wear a mask if they desired, but were not required. The crew kept a 6-foot distance from the dancers. Masks were provided on-site.

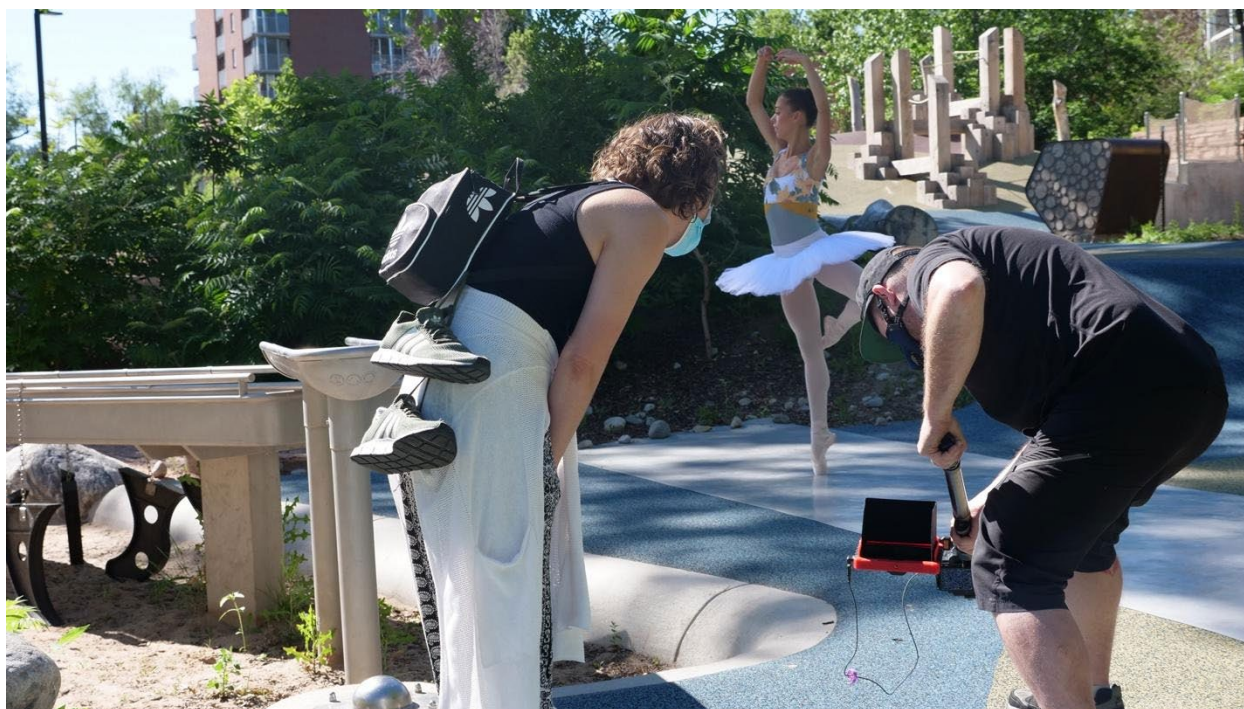
- We reshaped pre-production in May and began shooting in June. The film's theme had already begun formulating itself around the idea of "the first fresh breath in a while," but in the wake of first the pandemic and then the murder of George Floyd and the protests that followed, the weight of those words took on new meaning. Each dancer was invited to create movement responses to "breathing" - the right to it and the urgency of it enlightened and informed the making process. In matching our values, we employed dancers from many backgrounds: people who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQ, dancers with disabilities, and dancers of various ages, and this diversity of perspectives brought depth and volume to the piece.
- Shooting each dancer (or distanced duet) in their own location seemed simple, but of course, the challenges appeared one after another. Permits and insurance were new and large hurdles for us, especially with City and County offices, which were also shifting their policies and procedures with each new round of pandemic restrictions. Shooting was always tenuous. Many dancers were very comfortable being unmasked for performance, although this was not required, but we were always hoping that this wouldn't be the day someone started showing symptoms, not aware yet that they had contracted the virus. Any time we did need to get close to a dancer between shots to show footage or discuss something, they put the mask back on and then took it off again to shoot. Keeping dancers' masks available, clean, and untouched was like a side show act in the process.
- Collaboration with composers, a poet, and a voice actor was done almost entirely, eliminating those moments where you can watch and hear it come together with another person and see and feel their reactions. It was a lonelier process than we had envisioned, full of lots of individuals having tiny reactions in tiny rooms, separated by miles and time zones. While it was convenient that the process could continue asynchronously, it was disheartening at times to continue to take up the mantle alone.
- In surveying the artists about their participation afterwards, we learned that many appreciated having the footage for their own reels, but that several did not get the networking and connection opportunities they had hoped for when signing on. This was heartbreaking, and not as easy as we thought to just chalk it up to a result of the times. We still wish we had been able to do it better.



“This Breath Together” in production, courtesy Sans Souci.

The finalized screendance, “This Breath Together,” represents the work of so many artists (please, check the Appendix for credits), and the passion and spirit that brought our community through the pandemic. As the city of Boulder rallied to come together and find community through artistic experiences despite the isolation and loneliness that Covid-19 forced upon us, so, too, did Sans Souci. We debuted the film to an eager and appreciative audience at our eighteenth annual festival premiere. It has since screened at Wicklow ScreenDance Laboratory (Wicklow, Ireland) April 12, 2022; Red Rock ScreenDance Film Festival (St George, Utah, USA) June 1, 2022; Boulder County Filmmakers Showcase (Longmont, Colorado, USA) August 20, 2022; and Downtown Boulder Short Film Festival (Boulder, Colorado, USA) July 13, 2023.

Because the trepidation of planning an in-person event in September 2021 was still very real, we sought an outdoor venue for our premiere and found a dedicated partner in the Museum of Boulder. Their rooftop terrace, with a gorgeous view of the Flatirons (foothills of the Rocky Mountains), made for an astounding setting for viewing dance films, and the fresh air allowed more guests to feel comfortable attending a large event. In retrospect, this new collaboration was one lucky occurrence amidst many frightening and terrible ones during the pandemic, and we find ourselves enjoying this partnership ever since.



“This Breath Together” in production, courtesy Sans Souci.

Sans Souci Brazil in 2020

In 2020, we were scheduled to produce our second full-fledged edition of the Sans Souci Festival in Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, as a follow-up to our 2019 edition. Due to the pandemic, we needed to reimagine it. The Brazilian Sans Souci editions – 2019 and 2020 (and later in 2022) - were funded by PROAC, a grant program from the São Paulo State government. Dr. Júlia Ziviani Vitiello was the proponent of the grant both times, and with the essential support of her group, Dançaberta, the 2019 edition was a success. We did not want to let go of the 2020 opportunity, so Júlia, Dançaberta, and the US Sans Souci team devised ways to produce a fully online event, as accessible as our budget allowed.

The result was a two-week festival in August with four screenings, all consisting of films that had some relationship with Brazil, amongst which we had one screening for children and one dedicated to films related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to the support of PROAC, applications for the 2020 Sans Souci Brazilian edition were free, as were the online events. The films were made available online for two weeks, free to the public worldwide. Equally significant, we paired the screenings with virtual discussions and lectures, some of which were in Portuguese or English with live translations, and some of which were in Portuguese only. Most of these events were simulcast to YouTube, and the recordings are still available on [this link](#):

- Screening K: “K is for Kids!” Facebook watch party screening for children, with the films interspersed with ‘workshop’ videos created by Rosely Conz, asking young viewers to actively dance while watching, using movement and concepts from the films for an embodied viewing.
- Mini-course: “The Jump from Stage to Screen: the Basics of Getting Good Dance Footage” with Ana Baer Carrillo and Michelle Bernier

- Keynote Address: “Representation in Screendance” with Cara Hagan
- Lecture “Screendance: Possible Readings” with Leonel Brum
- Roundtable “Approaches to Screendance from Creation to Submission” with Ana Baer, Heike Salzer and Rodrigo Rocha-Campos
- Q&A: “Artists of the Season - Screening A” with Beatrice Martins, Cícero Fraga, Diogo Angeli, Daniel Santos, Welket Bungué, and Felipe Teixeira
- Roundtable: “Body Writings in Screendance” with Andrea Maciel & Beatriz Cerbino
- Lecture: "The body at the service of subjectivity - Let's Talk About Black Dance(s)" with Rui Moreira
- Q&A: “Artists of the Season – Screening B” with Bárbara Cunha, Mary Gatis, Loretta Pelosi, Pedro Krull, and Tainá Pompêo
- Closing Roundtable: "Kinesthesia and Videodance" with Karina Almeida & Lilian Graça

Films for Sans Souci Brazil were produced both before and during the pandemic. In "Every Point in a Curve (Todos os Pontos da Curva)," directed by Francisco Míguez and choreographed by Bibi Dória, a handful of dancers make contact and explore each other's negative space, while the carefully choreographed camera gets up close and personal with them, no masks in sight, reminding us of all of pre-pandemic freedoms. "Dancing the limitation (Dança em tempos de limitação)" by Ayumi Hanada, features a dozen dancers in their apartments dancing in 6-foot squares taped out on the floor.

Dr. Júlia Ziviani and group Dançaberta worked tirelessly to make this possible, facing regional challenges, such as the need for dedicated internet due to the conditions of this service in Brazil, or having to go through enormous amounts of bureaucracy to adjust the budget to accommodate live translations (English –Portuguese), a service that is expensive and not easily accessible in Brazil. All their work paid off, though. The event was well attended and provocative, a truly collaborative endeavor. It was exciting having folx connecting on Zoom from all over the world, contributing with meaningful questions and thoughts, sharing an array of experiences that would not be possible otherwise - because of the shift to online programing, we were able to gather guests and screendance enthusiasts from many countries, including but not limited to USA, Brazil, Canada, etc. Since we would probably need another page or two to mention all of them here, we encourage you to peruse the website with full credits [using this link](#).

Back Home

Like many festivals, we fought hard to maintain a sense of normalcy in 2020, while adapting as best we could, still hosting our premiere screening in collaboration with the University of Colorado Boulder (albeit as an online screening), while adding the new category, the Covid-19/Quarantine Challenge Category, to address our community's changing needs. These Quarantine Challenge films ranged from solos in the wilderness to tiny dances shot in the dancers' own kitchens. Desi Jevon's "Pasion de Manos" shows only a set of hands dancing and could have been filmed in a shoebox. "Morning Coffee" directed by Deny Ardianto, for example, reveals dancer/choreographer Dwi Windarti in her home in Indonesia going through her morning routine, as it had been affected by the pandemic. The description states, "Covid-19 depresses everyone. Space becomes limited, houses run out of food, boredom and tension cannot be escaped. But everyone seeks to stay sane, in their own way." As a collection, this virtual screening turned out to be a true testament to living as an artist through these times.

To increase engagement in both the Premiere and Quarantine Challenge screenings and add value to the programming, we hosted a series of four Artist Chats, each on a subject related to dance filmmaking at that moment:

- Staying Creative in Trying Times (September 28, 2020) hosted by Keith Haynes, with directors Deny Tri Ardianto, Charli Brissey, Talia Shea Levin and Maritza Navarro
- Intersectionality and Identity in Screendance (September 30, 2020) hosted by Cara Hagan, with directors Antoine Panier, Harold George, Welket Bungué, and Daniel Santos
- Bodies in Spaces - where site specificity meets the screen (October 1, 2020) hosted by Heike Salzer, with directors Abby Warrilow, Lewis Gourlay, Fu Le, Thomas Delord, Sheil Garcia and Inés Valderas
- New Possibilities for Screendance (October 2, 2020) with Sans Souci curators Ana Baer Carrillo, Michelle Bernier, Rosely Conz, and Heike Salzer.

For each of the first three chats, we invited a handful of contributing artists for the new season whose work specifically correlated with these topics, as well as a moderator (chosen from among Sans Souci contributors from past seasons and collaborations with special expertise in their subject). For the fourth chat, we had a conversation among Sans Souci curators regarding the state of the dance cinema and what it can offer as a pedagogical tool in the dance classroom. While we needed to charge a ticket price to watch the premiere screening, we were able to make both the Covid screening and this round of Artist Chats free to the public, increasing accessibility to dance cinema, as is always our aim.

Our partners of many seasons, the Dairy Arts Center in Boulder, Colorado, turned their parking lot into a Drive-In for their summer film series, and we were delighted to be invited to jump on that bandwagon! As our only in-person event since the pandemic began, our first drive-in series sold out for two nights, August 30 and 31, 2020, and our second round back on October 4 and 5, 2020, was almost as full. We didn't have to search hard for a reason - folks were so hungry for in-person events, so thrilled to be out of their homes and enjoying art, and just plain ecstatic to be doing that safely in the presence of others. It felt amazing to be able to provide a space for gathering around the arts, when, for good reason, that would have been nearly impossible to do in any other way that year.



Drive-In at Dairy Arts Center, Boulder. Courtesy Sans Souci.

Another learning outcome from the pandemic was the importance of collaboration. Besides our partnership with Brazil, we doubled down with our long-time screening partner, Ursinus College, producing a private virtual screening in September and Q&A with director Amy O'Neal and performer Michael O'Neal Jr of "How it Feels." The pandemic did not slow down our momentum in gaining new partners, as we were able to team up with the Colorado Chautauqua Association to screen the documentary "Tour de Force" directed by Brad Stabio and featuring Colorado Ballet, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, and Wonderbound, the three most historically notable dance companies in our home state of Colorado. The virtual screening ran from November 6 through December 31, 2020, and we hosted the directors for a virtual Q&A on November 20, 2020. This event allowed us to truly focus on our priority of promoting and supporting local artists. We also teamed up with Martha's Vineyard Film Society (a group that typically screens only non-dance films) for another online screening from October 23 through November 6, 2020, and this time pre-recorded a Q&A as 'bonus materials' for ticket holders with the director Francesca N. Penzani and performers Kyreeana Alexander and Nedra Wheeler of "Double Up." We were thrilled to be carrying the flag of dance cinema into a venue that has screened many kinds of films for many years, but had never screened dance films before. These online screenings also provided the chance to hear about the films directly from their creators and imbued the viewing experience with a personal, intimate perspective, taking their understanding of the films'

cultural contributions to a different level. Truly, it reminded us of the crucial nature of our work -- not just screening the work, but building audiences to build community, and building community to support the artists in making the work.



“Tour de Force” director and subjects in a virtual Q&A, courtesy Sans Souci.

Having been accepted to present a panel titled *Empathy through the Screen: Implications for Creating, Curating, and Screening Dance Cinema* at the National Dance Educators Conference (NDEO) in October, three of our curators, Rosely Conz, Michelle Bernier, and Bailey Anderson, adapted their presentation for the online format without hesitation. As an arts organization with education as a part of our mission, it was important to us to take every opportunity this year to connect with educators about the value of dance film in the classroom, tools for utilizing it, and resources for understanding and accessing work in the genre. We continue to develop this research on how empathy is created through watching dance film, and the power and responsibility that comes with that ethically, socially, and developmentally.

Platforms, Access, and Interconnection

We hosted 2020 events on many online platforms to increase accessibility and to experiment with this new phase of festival production. Films in the Covid-19/Quarantine Challenge were screened both on our website (free) for a week, and released for 48 hours on Facebook, Vimeo, and Instagram’s video feature, IGTV. Not only did this reach viewers who had never attended a dance film screening, but it also challenged the paradigm of trick-filled spectacles as the only way to experience dance videos on Instagram. Our 2020 Brazil events were simulcast to YouTube, and are still available for viewing; likewise, our Artist Chat series was recorded,

edited, and uploaded to Vimeo and our website, where they are also still available for viewing as of this publishing. Several screening partner events used Eventive as a platform, and all our Q&As and Artist Chats happened over Zoom. We found that the multiplicity of methods of transmission increased our reach, broadening our audience, reaching many folx who had never attended a dance film screening before. Particularly in sharing through social media, we created a sense of interconnection among audiences and artists and provided more economically equitable access to the programming.

We also found that our interconnectedness helped us manage during these times. We who run the festival together found it a great excuse to stay connected to friends. We wanted to be there for friends who were experiencing grief in their families and networks due to the virus, and support those who had lost work or even their sense of where their careers were going. In the years following, we wanted to witness each other's lives, celebrate the births of their children, congratulate them on new jobs, stand up with them when their unions went on strike, and be with them during their heartbreaks and losses. It is our friendship that has kept Sans Souci together, and Sans Souci that has kept our friendships together, and for that we are extremely grateful.



Togetherness and laughter in virtual space, courtesy Sans Souci.

An archive of all films screened during the pandemic is available under Past Events on our website, sanssoucifest.org.

2021 and beyond

The effects of the pandemic continue to influence our work with Sans Souci. Artists continue to struggle, and the end of Covid-19 emergency and relief grants is a source of anxiety and instability for many. We can now confidently say that Sans Souci experienced a boom in submissions in the pandemic years 2020 through 2022, and that our submissions for 2023 and 2024 seem to be leveling out, albeit at a still higher level than before the pandemic. We have pondered various explanations for this. Perhaps our efforts to keep the dance and film communities connected during the pandemic paid off, and more dance filmmakers have heard of us, or dance film festivals in general?

We did make significant efforts to continue to expand our definitions of dance and dance film in 2021, adding categories for music videos, documentaries, micro-shorts, and hybrid performance/documentations, as well as films by youth, students, and first-time filmmakers. In 2022, we added categories for jazz dance films (thanks to a collaboration with Rhythmically Speaking, Twin Cities Film Festival, and Boulder Jazz Dance Workshop) and VR/360 films. Do more categories attract more submitters? Or encourage past submitters to make more or different kinds of work? Finally, could it be that dance cinema just seems like a more accessible option to artists now, since their technical know-how and expressive range increased during the pandemic? Is dance cinema seeing an increase in size and scope, since so many dancers took their work online out of necessity?

As curators, we see more and more professional directors working with their students to create films – in fact, we added a category for that, “directors working with students,” – as well as video essays in 2024. We see more collaborations where choreographers are the directors, and the cinematography is hired out. As we have since our inception, we continue to welcome films that experiment with the medium itself, imagining new possibilities that cross between existing and forming genres.

In 2022, we collaborated with the “Gastro Think Tank” Festival in Bogotá, Colombia, for a month-long installation of archive films, plus two in-person screenings and a workshop. In 2023, we celebrated our 20th anniversary with a new iteration of the Community Dance Film Project (more on that below), a sold-out premiere, and more virtual and in-person screenings than ever. We collaborated on two more long-term installations: a 20th anniversary retrospective throughout the summer at the Museum of Boulder, and a 3-week live performance and film project with Fimudanza in Morelia, Mexico, in August. We have refreshed our relationships with old screening partners and built new ones. Our creative aging program, *Dance is Like a Fine Wine*, has soared to new heights in the last 5 years, with partnerships in 8 local and 2 out-of-state older adult residential and recreational facilities.

In an effort to keep cross-pollinating and encouraging new possibilities, and because of how well-loved the Artist Chat series was, we teamed up with San Francisco Dance Film Festival and the International Screendance Calendar to produce a series of Screendance Coffee Chats. Beginning in the summer of 2023 and still ongoing, these open community Zoom calls encourage artists, producers, curators, and festival administrators in the international community to come together in the most informal way possible. We have experimented with different times of the day and week to accommodate artists in different time zones, but we have also learned that several artists make the commitment to show up even if it’s the middle of the night where they are. The chats are only structured by introductions at the beginning, and an open request for topics or questions from anyone in attendance. Discussions have touched upon everything from funding a film to embodied practices for shooting to curatorial practices and preferences from various festivals. We have found these discussions enlightening as programmers and artists and hope to continue them indefinitely.

We also had the third edition of *Sans Souci Brazil* in November 2022, again, thanks to the work of Dr. Julia Ziviani and Dançaberta, who secured the PROAC grant. Using what we learned during the pandemic, we had in-person, hybrid, and online events, streamed on YouTube. Moreover, we had Brazilian Sign Language translation and audio description for panels and lectures, as well as translators for the international guests who only spoke English and Spanish.

All the marketing material posted on social media followed accessibility guidelines (image description, universal design), aligning with the requirements of the PROAC grant, as well as our efforts to continue promoting diversity and inclusion.

In the continuing evolution of the Community Dance Film Project, we've focused our efforts on expanding opportunities for directors. A 2023-4 iteration of this project was multifold: we offered two experienced choreographers, Megan Roney and Keith Haynes, a chance to direct their first-ever dance films, and created youth workshops that put young dancers in the driver's seat of their first films. Plans are in the works for a 2025-6 adaptation, where we ourselves will visit a new medium. We hope to create our first dance film in Virtual Reality, pending grant funding and a successful collaboration with a local VR production company. We hope to have a long-running installation of the work at a Boulder venue that is open to the public, to allow those who cannot make it to a festival event the chance to experience dance cinema on a VR headset, individualizing an embodied cinematic experience in the virtual company of local dance artists.

These exciting adventures have led us to a new future, where we think of the role of a dance film festival as much broader than before. Not only can we produce screenings, discussions, and workshops, but also ongoing educational programming, public art installations, and film projects of our own. This kind of expansion is not for every festival. There always will be and should be a place for festivals to just screen the work and celebrate the artists. For Sans Souci, however, we see opportunities to help cultivate the future of the field as more equitable, accessible, innovative, and collaborative, and we just can't help ourselves. We've got to dig in.

References

McCort, Kalene. "Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema: Tempting Viewers to Sway, Spin, and Dance Along for Year 19." *Boulder Daily Camera*, 31 Aug. 2022, <https://www.dailycamera.com/2022/08/31/sans-souci-festival-of-dance-cinema-tempting-viewers-to-sway-spin-and-dance-along-for-year-19/>.

Appendix

"This Breath Together"

Director & Editor: Michelle Bernier

Producer: Tom Wingerd

Director of Photography: Jesse Rarick

Choreographers/Dancers: Cindy Brandle, Luciana Da Silva, Danielle K. Garrison, Briana Georjae, Sarah Harrison, Keith Haynes, Bridget Heddens, Vivian Kim, Gina Medina, Emma Michaux, Alex Milewski, Peg Volpe Posnick, Jessica Riggs, Gwen Ritchie, Marla A. Schulz, Alfred Smith, Nancy E. Smith, and Miah Yager

Composers/Musicians: Sean Connolly, Kristen Demaree, and Dudu Fuentes

Poet: Brooke McNamara

Voice Actor: Alfred Smith

Production Assistants: Sean Connolly, Katy Gallagher, Holly Schlotterback, and Tom Wingerd

Photo Captions and Credits

BernierConz-1 - The team running Sans Souci Brazil - clockwise from upper left, including Bruno Harlyson, Ana Baer Carrillo, Michelle Bernier, Rosely Conz, and Julia Ziviani Vitello - worked hard and laughed harder over many long video calls.

Credit: n/a

BernierConz-2 - Cinematographer Jesse Rarick of Sparta Media and Director Michelle Bernier stayed socially distanced from dancer Peg Volpe Posnick while shooting our Community Dance Film Project in 2020.

Credit: Thomas Wingerd

BernierConz-3 - Outside the Boulder Public Library's playground, Boulder Ballet dancer Emma Michaux performed her own choreography *en pointe*, framed by Cinematographer Jesse Rarick of Sparta Media and Director Michelle Bernier.

Credit: Thomas Wingerd

BernierConz-4 - Director Zoe Marsh's film "4040 HOME" (2020, Australia) screened at Dairy Arts Center's makeshift drive-in cinema, taking over their parking lot and screening films on the side of the building in August of 2020.

Credit: n/a

BernierConz-5 - Our Zoom Q&A for the virtual screening of "Tour de Force" created space for a discussion between film director Brad Stabio, Colorado Ballet Artistic Director Gil Bogs, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble Artistic Director Cleo Parker Robinson, and Wonderbound Artistic Director Garrett Ammon, for the first time since the live performance collaboration that is documented by the film.

Credit: n/a