

National Endowment for the Arts Names New Councilmembers

The U.S. Senate recently approved President Obama's nominations to the National Council for the Arts. Among the new appointees are two with close ties to NPN: Maria Rosario Jackson, Senior Advisor to the Kresge Foundation and an NPN board member, and Maria López De León, executive director of NALAC (National Association of Latino Arts and Culture), one of NPN's strategic partners. For more information on all the Council members visit www.nea.gov/about/NCA/About_NCA.html#Council

A Reflection on and Resources for Latin American/Caribbean Touring

Sound artist and festival director Chris Cogburn of Austin Texas was one of six artists whose projects were supported by the Performing America Program's Creative Exchange Residency Program last year. Continue to the next pages to read Cogburn's deep reflection on his journey in Mexico. In addition to supporting NPN Partners who bring Latin and Caribbean artists to the U.S., the Exchange also supports U.S. artists traveling to Latin America and the Caribbean. Interested? For more information, go to: npnweb.org/whatwedo/international-program/performing-americas/guidelines/. Deadline is April 26, 2013 for projects between August 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014.

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Sharon Bridgforth, *River See* (photo by Vanessa Vargas)

“All roads have come together. We are connecting our tribes.”

Sharon Bridgforth writes a poetic and jazzy reflection on the long and increasingly textured journey of creating River See. From a chance encounter at an NPN Annual Meeting, to a Performance Residency at Links Hall, to a full-blown Creation and Forth Fund project, Bridgforth's new work tests the limits of her own artistic and spiritual practice.

Reflections on Grace and Gratitude

by Sharon Bridgforth

I think my name might be Roux.

As in/the one that gets stirred.

The base of the gumbo.

It all started in 1993 when Chris Cowden (Women & Their Work) took a video of my theatre company's show to a NPN Annual Meeting... but I guess that's a whole nutha story/yeah. So I'll fast forward to 2008 and the NPN Annual Meeting in Seattle.

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Grateful for the Support...

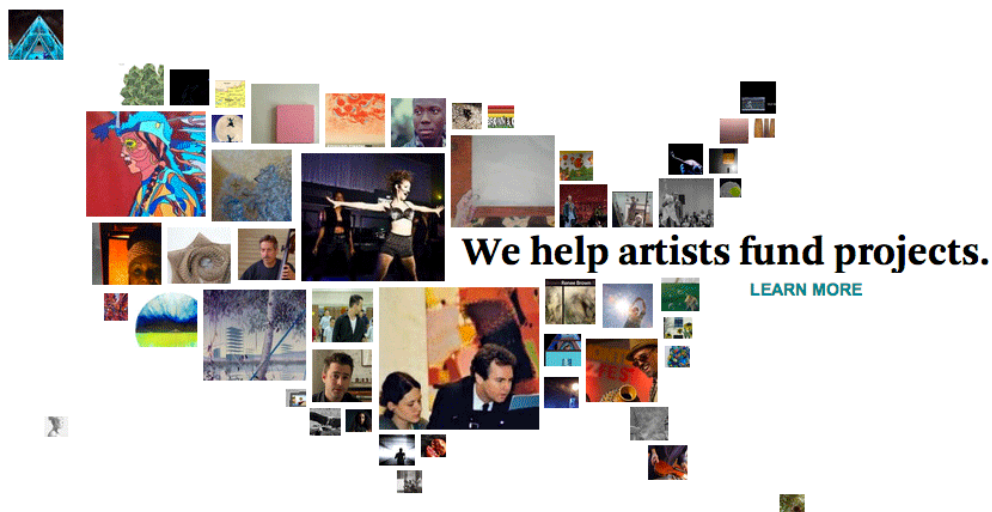
170 generous folks contributed nearly \$23,000 towards NPN's annual fundraising appeal, many of them during December's Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. The number of people donating to NPN's general operating fund showed an increase of nearly 40% over last year.

In 2012 NPN received contributions from . . .

Idris Ackamoor	Valarie Castillo	Tom Guralnick	John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	Lillian Osei-Boateng	Monica Meyer
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Estevan Azcona	Judy Hussie-Taylor	Dana Iova-Koga	Vicki Meek	Laurel Raczk	The Theater Offensive
Steve Bailey	Chris Cowden	Germaine Ingram	Sam Miller	Otto Ramstad	Tigertail Productions
Eric Bass	Shannon Daut	Gayle Isa	Tim Miller	Real Art Ways	José Torres-Tama
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Philip Bither	Lori Dillard	Emily Johnson	Lisa Mount	Deborah Riley	Denise Uyehara
Emily Bivens	Bill Doolin	Rosemary Johnson	LB Muñoz	Mildred Ruiz	Kinan Valdez
Rebecca Blunk	Sean Dorsey	Joanne Jones-Rizzi	Meena Natarajan & Dipankar Mukherjee	Daniel Rybeck	Samuel Valdez
Meredith Boggia	Elizabeth Doud	Christopher Kaminstein	Sara Nash	Abe Rybeck	Clyde Valentin
Paul Bonin-Rodriguez	Erin Boberg Doughton	Katie Ka Vang	Letta Neely	Chizu Saito	Benjamin Volta
Edward Bourgeois	Sandy Dunn	James Kass	Lisa Nelson-Hayes	Amina Sanchez	Shay Wafer
Stanlyn Brevé	Jess Edkins	Kristan Kennedy	New York Live Arts	San Francisco Artist Services	Sixto Wagan
Sharon Bridgforth	El Centro Su Teatro	Sarah Kramer	Ed Noonan	Suzanne Sbarge	Rosie Gordon Wallace
Art Bridgman & Myrna Packer	F Magazine	Dan Kwong	Cassandra Parker Nowicki	JoAnna Mendl Shaw	MK Wegmann
Henriëtte Brouwers & John Malpede	Laura Faure	James Lawton	Molly O'Connor	Augusto Soledad	Thérèse Wegmann
Ann Brusky	Evelyn Francis	Betty Leacraft	ODC Theater	John Spokes	Wexner Center for the Arts
Lisa Byrd	Myrna Anderson Fuller	Rebekah Lengel	Cynthia Oliver	Linda Shearer	Kim Whitener
Armando Castellano	Fusebox Festival	Melissa Li	On the Boards	Janella Sellars	Sarah Wilke
Teo Castellanos	Vallejo Gantner	Steve Liggett	Joan Osato	Alex Shaw	Helanius Wilkins
	Leo Garcia	Abel Lopez		Dawnell Smith	Kristina Wong
	Jennifer Gardner	Patricia Ma		Michele Steinwald &	Kyoko Yoshida
					Paul Zaloom

...and Happy to Provide Support

Are you an artist who has been supported by a NPN or VAN Subsidy? Would you like to invest in an artist who has received an NPN subsidy? If so, you are eligible to fundraise or donate through United States Projects — United States Artists!



NPN/VAN has partnered with United States Artists to help artists raise money through the high profile USA Projects fundraising platform. United States Artists mission is to invest in America's finest artists and illuminate the value of artists to society. As a strategy to invest in more artists and increase awareness of artists in America beyond the USA Fellows program, United States Artists created USA Projects.

USA Projects is the first online fundraising platform and social network designed exclusively to connect accomplished artists with those who love the arts. Now any artist supported by NPN or VAN can raise money for projects both from within their network and through USA Projects' ever-expanding community of arts lovers. What sets USA Projects apart from other for-profit crowd-funding websites is that it is *100% free for artists*. Artists receive *all* of the money they raise, no credit card or service fees are deducted. Donors are invited to make an additional tax-deductible donation — ranging

from 0-19% — to support the servicing of the creative work and USA's mission.

Why USA Projects? USA Projects has a 75% success rate (which exceeds other platforms by 30%). USA Projects experts help artists succeed with fundraising goals through project development, fundraising and outreach training and personal support. Every project receives matching funds, which encourages donations from high profile donors, artists, art lovers and friends. NPN/VAN has set up a matching fund for NPN/VAN artists who fundraise through USA Projects. To date, eleven NPN artists have successfully made their project goals including: Nejla Yarkin, Denise Uyehara, Zoe|Juniper, Kristina Wong, Andrea Assaf, Bridgman/Packer, Shinichi Iova-Koga, Teo Castellanos, Helanius Wilkins, and Gesel Mason.

Learn more by visiting USA Projects www.usaprojects.org. If you are a NPN or VAN supported artist who would like to participate, contact Stanlyn Brevé, stanlyn@npnweb.org.

Chris Cogburn Digs Deep into Mexico's Experimental Music Scene



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My participation in NPN's Creative Exchange led to an unforeseen whirlwind of activity and the deepening of creative relationships in Mexico City over the course of five weeks between August 20 and September 24, 2012. The connections formed with artists, institutions, curators and other cultural generators in and around Mexico City was of such strength and dynamism that it kept me there for an extra 10 weeks, until my subsequent return home to Austin, Texas on December 4, 2012. All in all, through the unique structure of PAP, I was more able to fully embrace, actualize and transport my creative work to a new environment than on any preceding journey abroad.

For the Performing Americas Program, I partnered with Mexico City classical guitarist and experimental musician Fernando Viguera and the Unidad de Vinculación Artística (UVA), an Academy of Arts located in Tlatelolco, Mexico City. The first step in this project was my already existing connection with Fernando, and our commitment to finding a way to work

together in performance, recording, teaching and curation. The second step was connecting with UVA, the host/sponsor of this project and the site of an experimental music class taught by Viguera. The third step was the work Fernando and I did together to capitalize on the dynamic cultural situation currently taking place in Mexico City.

I first came in contact with Fernando Viguera at the *Cha'ak'ab Paaxil Festival de Improvisación Libre, Free Jazz y Noise* in Mérida, Yucatán, México in 2008. Exposure to each other's work and the discovery of sympathetic interests in improvisation lead to a quick friendship and, in 2009, while in residence at Casa Vecina in Mexico City, Fernando and I had the chance to perform together for the first time, albeit briefly.

Our meeting came at a time when I was first traveling and working in Mexico and was situated in the context of a greater process of cultural movement and the beginnings of exchange between a new generation of sound artists and organizers in the U.S. and Mexico. At the time, Mexico fascinated my U.S.

colleagues and me. It was an unfamiliar and mysterious neighbor whose contemporary cultural output was fairly unknown and limited to the stories of Mexican ex-pat musicians living in Texas or friends' travels to the country several years prior. My brief trips to perform in Monterrey, Mérida, and Mexico City between 2006-2010 offered me the opportunity to begin to understand the complexities of cultural production in Mexico and the unique work of those artists engaged in experimental music practice.

While my preceding trips to Mexico yielded great music and strong friendships, I couldn't help but feel like there was something more to be experienced than my regular "touring" would allow. I wanted to know the culture, where this music was coming from. Music has always been a social practice for me—a way to connect and affirm relationships, work, difference and joy. Working, forming deep relationships, acknowledging and celebrating difference and experiencing joy takes time. The Performing Americas Program provides resources for these processes to happen and



allows deep, collective artistic practice to take root and move forward.

My intention going to Mexico City for the Performing Americas Program was to participate and contribute to the ongoing culture. Doing this in a generative and lasting way means first listening to the processes already taking place. Vigueras' improvised and experimental music class at UVA was an unbelievable place to land. Housed in the sprawling Tlatelolco complex in central Mexico City, Vigueras' students ranged in age from 17 to 50+ and came from all corners of the city. It was a dynamic crew to say the least. The class was welcoming and engaging and their openness and creativity was a challenge to keep up with. Throughout my stay in Mexico City, this class (and Fernando's genius, and kind and engaged teaching methods) acted as my home — offering me some resemblance of consistency in the tumultuousness that is El D.F. (Distrito Federal).

My first six weeks in Mexico City was spent working with Fernando's class two days a week while taking Spanish language classes

at UNAM in the mornings five days a week. Early on, I worked with the class on several Pauline Oliveros pieces that led to an inspired performance of Oliveros' Sound Piece on the UVA campus. My previous creative connections activated quickly once I was in the city and I found myself performing one to three times a week with a host of artists including Rogelio Sosa, Juan José Rivas, Juan Pablo Villa, Carlos Maldonado, Fernando Lomeli, Rolando Hernández, Barbara Lazara, Misha Marks, Juan Garcia, and Fernando Vigueras.

Each of these artists is moving through the cultural landscape of Mexico City in their own unique way — setting up their own concert series, forming their own ensembles, applying for funding, exploiting trends in popular culture, establishing themselves in the academy, and taking advantage of the great cultural houses, institutions and galleries in Mexico City. The time allotted through PAP allowed me to collaborate with these artists several times and begin to understand their own way of existing in the city. The life path of each artist reflects

a socio-economic reality that speaks to the art they make. Life is different for each and having time to contemplate the complexity of this, while simultaneously seeing how artists come together as a community to make work together, was inspiring.

It was this movement, the way in which things happen, the way in which people do things in Mexico City that I was looking for when I applied for the PAP funding. Having the time and resources to think and act tactically is the gift the Performing Americas Program offers.

Several weeks before landing in Mexico City, Fernando Vigueras and I were busy brainstorming projects. The initial event we planned for was my participation in UVA's *Cerro de Arena* festival of contemporary art. UVA had invited me to curate a special mini-festival inside of *Cerro de Arena*, and I invited several colleagues join the event, named *Desde El Silencio Festival: Exploraciones Abstractas de La Forma*. With my allies in Mexico City and the collective desire for international collaboration, I was able to line-up several other events in the city for my colleagues and me to engage in.

Participating artists included musicians Andrea Neumann (Berlin), Burkhard Beins (Berlin), Liz Allbee (Berlin), Bonnie Jones (Baltimore) and dancer Nicole Bindler (Philadelphia). Performances, lectures, master classes and workshops were given at UVA over the course of the 7-day festival.

This was a highlight of my time in Mexico City, as it was the first full-scale inter-media festival that I have curated and organized outside of the U.S. It was also the first time I have presented my own compositions outside of the U.S. UVA was generous with their resources and our partnership was successful in several seemingly enduring ways; not the least of which was the enthusiasm of UVA's students and the attention garnered towards UVA as a site for contemporary artistic practice.

Directly preceding *Desde El Silencio*, Mexico City sound artist Juan José Rivas invited myself, Andrea Neumann, Burkhard Beins, Liz Allbee and Fernando Viguera to do a mini-tour of Mexico City's neighboring cities Tlaxcala and Puebla. This was in conjunction with his excellent experimental concert series Volta in Mexico City, which we all performed in prior to this three-day mini-tour. Traveling with Juan José and witnessing the inner-workings of how a tour of this nature takes place was a valuable experience and gave me some insight into the movement of culture outside of Mexico City.

In our initial stages of planning, Fernando and I left space for things to happen organically. Our largest, most satisfying work together outside of Viguera's class at UVA occurred in this space. Together, we co-organized and curated a four-week series of improvised music concerts to accompany Derek Bailey's seminal documentary *On The Edge: Improvisation In Music*. The series took place at the beautiful art cinema Cine Tonalá, in Mexico City's bustling La Roma neighborhood. In the weeks leading up to the series, Fernando and I transcribed, translated and subtitled the four-hour documentary. (This was the first-ever Spanish translation showing of the film.) In a fashion similar to the *Desde El Silencio Festival*, Fernando and I invited several international

artists who were passing through Mexico City at the time to participate in the series. Participating artists included myself, Dafne Vicente-Sandoval (Paris, France), Xavier Lopez (Paris, France), Angélica Castelló (Vienna), Andrea Neumann (Berlin), Sandy Ewen (Houston), Damon Smith (Houston), Bonnie Jones (Baltimore), Vic Rawlings (Boston), Milo Tamez (Chiapas, Mexico) and Mexico City musicians Remi Álvarez, Juan García, Fernando Viguera, Juan José Rivas, Rogelio Sosa and Carmina Escobar.

An intention behind this series, dubbed *Desbordamientos: Aproximación a la Música Improvisada*, was to create a container to ground and actualize a diverse confluence of artists and processes underway in tandem to my time in residence. Thinking back, I see the series contextualizing my time in Mexico City in relation to others' time in the city. PAP funding allowed me to embrace a broader spectrum of cultural production and artistic process than my normal touring affords. I was able to fully actualize and transport my skill set to a new place. My work as an improvising musician, concert organizer, curator, composer and teacher were all foregrounded while in residence in Mexico City. I was able to do what I do—all that I do. The *Desbordamientos* series, its success and failures, exemplified this.

Lastly, The idea of place and its relation to the "way in which one does" is valuable to consider when thinking of international cultural exchange. On one hand, there is the physical place one is acting from (in this case, Mexico City), and on the other, there is the "place" one is imagining while acting. There is a rift between the two no matter where one is working from, and perhaps this rift is amplified when cultures are crossed. My time in Mexico City was a long contemplation on this rift and all its gradations. Being surrounded by creativity—all the artists, students, teachers and the people in one of the greatest sites of daily improvised living, Mexico City—allowed this rift to express its flexibility and allowed me a greater understanding of the way in which Mexico City moves.

Advice for others who would like to do this kind of exchange:

Working towards a residency of this magnitude can happen anywhere at anytime. Your active pursuit of creative exchange with others abroad, coupled with creating opportunities for similar exchanges in your home city, can happen right now. Magnitude is less important than direction—become sensitive to the aspects in your work that facilitate exchange. The size and articulation of projects fluctuate, but the direction of working with others can remain the same.

While in residence, be patient and think in the long term. If this is your first time working abroad, or in a specific country, keep a broad view towards the things supporting your creative work. I took my PAP Residency as a time to both contemplate the relationships and resources that sustain my artistic practice at home, while recognizing similar manifestations and articulations in the city I was visiting. A special aspect of the PAP residency is the time allotted to forge strong relationships to artists, students and institutions that can yield future work and creative projects in the region. This is a process that can be built upon.

What's happening now:

I am writing this 10 days from the 10th annual *No Idea Festival* (noideafestival.com) — a festival of improvised music I organize in Austin, Texas. This year's festival is focusing on collaborations between U.S. and Mexican sound artists. Mexican artists involved in this year's festival include: Misha Marks, Remi Álvarez, Rolando Hernández (Mexico City) and Milo Tamez (Chiapas, Mexico). This work is a direct result of my time in Mexico City last year via NPN's Performing America's Program.

Reflections on Grace and Gratitude

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Deep listening. Simultaneity, polyrhythm, virtuosity, improvisation, innovation.

Focus on process. Curiosity. Expansion. Being present. Collaboration. Spirit.

My twenty years of community organizing, facilitating, presenting theatre nationally inform the metaphysics of this Work/this Jazz.

Long-term ongoing connections with artists, scholars, scientists, healers, community leaders, presenters align.

My body is central. Dang. This is a big mountain to heft forward.

After hearing Erica Mott speak about the Education and Community Programs at Links Hall (NPN Partner in Chicago), I knew that I had found a place that I could call home. After inappropriately bursting out with, "I must work with you guys," and a wee bit of stalking, even though Erica must have thought I was crazy, she encouraged me to stay in touch. I was living in New York at the time, but I did stay in touch. Once I found out that I would be the Fall 2009 Mellon Artist In-Residence in the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University, I contacted Erica and we started planning. We met. We talked. We visioned. Links received NPN Community Fund support that allowed me to facilitate a mentoring intensive with local artists. By this time Roell Schmidt came on as Director of Links Hall.

This is an acoustic piece.

One singer.

One Actor.

Dancers.

A Choir of people speaking bits of text in as many languages as possible.

Light Walkers: bodies creating patterns/circles, straight lines, diagonals

that weave the ritual. Migrations.

The entire room is the performance space.

The audience is part of the Orchestra.

The Orchestra responds to my signals.

I no longer need musicians.

I still want a big ole holy Gong.

In 2010 I moved to Chicago to serve as the 2001-2012 Visiting Multicultural Faculty Member at the Theatre School at DePaul

University. Dean John Culbert approved funding for me to curate The Theatre Jazz Institute in partnership with Links Hall. We bought in guest artists, we had public performances and workshops, and I facilitated an intensive ongoing mentorship process with 14 emerging artists.

16 Orchestra members-one actor-myself-the audience.

Me and the audience.

Multiple choirs-one actor-a dance company-myself and the audience in a huge chapel.

A community center activity room.

A class room.

An auditorium/with part of the audience installed on the stage.

Each experiment different. Each community different. So much to learn.

#14 happens Feb. 24.

At some point Roell pulled me aside and said that she could see how my work impacted and helped so many artists. "What do you want to do?" Roell asked me, encouraging me to think about my own work. What a profound question. What a gift!

Like a jazz musician reaching for new sounds through repeated experiences of the same tune. I want to saturate myself in my texts.

Working texts in different ways. Varying the cast size. In different kinds of spaces.

Conducting the audience and the performers through an improvisational process. With the text as the structure. I want to explore living arrangements of blues as jazz. To activate Black American rural Southern traditions as the base for bringing people from different ethnicities, religions, generations, genders, sexual identities, places of origin, class backgrounds, abilities, and aesthetics/together. As performers. As collaborators. As audience witness-participants.

A collective experiment with time. A process in which democracy, civic dialogue, and spirituality become verbs through an embodied art practice.

Roell smiled, and said. Yes! Lets make that happen. And boyeee did she! With Links as the Lead Creation Fund Presenter, Roell gathered/and continues to gather/warrior-Visionaries in support of this work.

Links Hall/The Theater Offensive/Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator/Pillsbury House Theatre/Living Arts Tulsa/Chicago Boston Miami Minneapolis Tulsa/New Dramatists/Southside Community Arts Center/Columbia College/The Theatre School at DePaul/Stanford/Harvard/Black Studies Suite UT Austin/Yale/Brown/Northwestern/University of Chicago/University of Michigan/Chicago History Museum//planes, trains, buses, cabs, walking walking walking, CTA, MTA, MBTA/in the car with Rosie/Roell/Abe/Steve/Faye/Noel...NPN

Rosie (Diaspora Vibe) and I stayed in touch, pledging to work together since we met at the 2008 Annual Meeting; The Theater Offensive has been a home for me since 1996, when my theatre company (The root wy'mn Theatre Company) performed at TTO Out On The Edge Festival; I have worked with Pillsbury House Theatre pretty much every year since 2002; Roell said, I have someone that I think you are going to love working with, an organization that is a great fit for *River See* — Living Arts Tulsa (she was so right). Together we are rolling on the River BayBay! Thanks to Creation Fund and the Forth Fund, I am visiting each presenting community at least three times/working towards our NPN Residency Productions, and the eventual 2014 premiere at Links Hall. Along the way, organizations, scholars, activists, students and artists are joining up locally, and sometimes traveling to catch the River in other cities.

In 2004 I worked with Helga Davis/who worked with Lawrence "Butch" Morris-who developed CONDUCTION. Butch Transitioned recently. Helga is a principle in Einstein on the Beach.

I Love Robert Wilson's work.

I am obsessed with the idea of Conducting. Butch says all there is to say here/God Bless his Soul:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ykkp3F2bjRQ&feature=youtu.besh>

One of the reasons that an improvisational process works for *River See*, and that the show is tourable, is that one actor travels with me to play the role of SEE. SEE tells the story. Handles the body of text. I am therefore free to experiment with creating a moving



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soundscape made of bits of text distributed to locally cast Orchestras. Actors that so far have played SEE are: Sonja Parks, Florinda Bryant, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Daniel Alexander Jones and Djola Branner.

Can I get a Witness!

Thanks to National Performance Network Forth Funding

The answer is YES!

In developing *River See* I realized that I need a friend/a long time collaborator in the room to help me make connections between my artistic foundation, the new form I am working in, and the new thing that I am doing that I can't yet name. I know that it is critical that I dive into all that I am Inspired by and Am...to create my own cosmology for making this work. For fully realizing the text, the orchestration of the piece and how I talk about the project. So I gathered my Witnesses. They will be in the room/sometimes as performers. Sometimes as a collective. Sometimes individually. Always/ bringing their brilliance and Light/in helping me Lift *River See*.

*Robbie McCauley
Virginia Grise
Omi Osun Joni L. Jones
Nia Witherspoon*

Emily Morse, New Dramatists Director of Artistic Development, is Dramaturge for *River See*. While corresponding in preparation for our upcoming 3/1/13 Links Hall, *River See* experiment at Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago, Emily asked me, "Does the dramaturgy encompass what's on the page

and what happens in the room? Or maybe the question is, how do you see them separately but co-existently? Like, can you look at a Coltrane score independently of how he performs?"

Sometimes I feel Full. I just have to lay down.

Pillsbury House Theatre received MAP Funding in support of *River See*. We are doing a workshop production April 13-21, 2013. I've had some wonderful meetings with MAP Fund Consultant David Sheingold, during which I came to realize that *River See* is a Performance/ Novel. I need the full complete version of all the stories to exist. The Performance Text will be excerpted from the Performance/Novel. I will change out which stories are performed based who is in the room, and what the community we are in feels like. My goal is to have both the Performance/Novel and the Performance Text published as a book that includes a curriculum, as well as notes from some of the scholars, presenters, activists, artists involved. Meanwhile...I have the Blessing of fierce support as I work through the Journey. *What do I call this? How do I develop physical language to communicate with the Orchestra? Am I a Conductor? A Conjurer? A Trickster?*

*All roads have come together.
We are connecting our tribes.
Falling in Love.
Dreaming.
Our River is Flowing.
Wanna join up?*

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The Forth Fund is made possible by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.