

DAN TALKS ABOUT HIS HISTORY:

I loved music from when I was a kid - used to make up little songs and sing them. There are family movies of me circa 1960 trouncing around our suburban lawn singing to myself in my own universe while more “normal” activities like ball playing were simultaneously happening - in retrospect my parents must have been REALLY worried. A year or so later I started piano lessons – and began my early journey of musical learnings and a string of private teachers who were impressed with my creativity but confounded by my seeming inability to stick to the classical music program. But the upright piano in the basement became my refuge – my earliest memory of a piano improvisation/composition was an interpretation of rain (random tinkly high keys) and thunder (low dissonant chord clusters). This was fun! At school I sang in chorus and choir and joined the orchestra. When I was asked to choose an instrument I chose flute but the teacher told me flutes were for girls so I was assigned a clarinet. Uh oh – first effeminate indicator? I became one of the worst clarinet players in the history of the Abington Township school system and remained last chair in the woodwind section for years.

A bit later I started dancing classes which I loved and I began to participate in local competitions. I suppose the high point of that phase was winning a jitterbug competition at a regional dancing school event held at the Ben Franklin Hotel in downtown Philadelphia. Circa 1966. Flash forward to college where I began as an Art History major at Bucknell and then transferred to Dickinson (to be close to my girlfriend Beth) where I switched to Music History and Flute Performance (Ha – my return to the flute) and my first GREAT music teacher Beth Bullard who encouraged my creativity to flower in many directions. Also started to experiment with pot, hash, LSD etc. – and began to explore the stirrings of my attraction to other men. For various personal reasons I left college before graduation, moved briefly back with my parents in suburban Philly, and began to take day trips into the city where I started exploring and making friends. This is 1974/1975. I recall meeting a guy who invited me to a party on South Street at the loft of an artist friend of his – I remember being kind of freaked out by the crowd and the place – people appeared to be living in tents and were wearing strange capes and hats – later I realized this was a Woofy Bubbles (aka Christopher Hodge) art/fashion/performance salon.

I found a place to live in West Philly and kept returning to South Street where I made my way to Giovanni’s Room - one of the first Gay/Lesbian bookstores in the US where I met Tom Wilson (Weinberg) who started the store and was also a songwriter. A (very cute) guy named Danny Sherbo worked there and he was Tonio Guerra’s boyfriend at the time. Tonio was off in Europe performing with Group Motion and Danny turned me on to the Friday Night Workshops at the GM studio on Leithgow Street. I attended and was instantly floored by the improvised music and movement and the communal creative expression. I wanted IN – so I traveled with GM co-founder Manfred Fischbeck to Antioch College where GM was teaching a summer workshop and where I met the company who was returning from Europe. The next morning, in a sunny dance studio in Yellow Springs Ohio I met this troupe of great people who became my new family: Tonio, Jac Carley, Warren Muller, and (love of my life) Michael Biello.

Warren and Michael had bought and renovated a building at 529 South Street where they lived and had an art studio/gallery/store - Spacecraft. This was next door to the original Painted Bride at 527 South – which was in a storefront of a former bridal shop. I started helping out at the studio and getting involved with Michael both romantically and creatively. He would write me little quirky poems that I would set to music. Before long Michael and Jac Carley and I broke off from Group Motion and started rehearsing in a rough studio space Jac found in Roxborough (a very long commute on the bus). We started putting together shows that combined dances, songs, and short theatre pieces – Percussionist Kate Gavin-Brann was a frequent collaborator – and we performed in various small gallery spaces and theatres like the Bride, the Wilma Theatre, Group Motion Studio, and upstairs at 529 South Street where we collaborated with visual artists including Woofy and weavers Karen Sutch and Dennis Ambrogio. Before long Jac left her husband and moved north to a large, raw, top floor Old City loft on N. 3rd between Arch and Race (I think dancers Anne Marie Mulgrew and her sister Eileen were in the same building). Michael and Warren soon sold their South Street building, and bought the building at 148 N. 3rd. Terry Fox and Jeff Cain’s studio on Church Street became a weekly gathering place for yoga and improv and art. Ishmael and Terry began performing together. And the Bride was now on Bread Street.

Ishmael and Michael created Two Men Dancing in 1976 and I was the musical director – creating some original music, finding other recorded music – and working with their text - which they would write (on paper in long hand) in brain storming sessions. Looking back I think this was pretty radical stuff at the time – giving creative voice and building a performance to express, process, and celebrate our newly found identities as gay men. I don’t think we had seen it anywhere else – it just flowed out of our various creative hearts and minds – our individual journeys including “coming out” as gay men – and our reactions to the homophobia that was prevalent in the culture (even the liberal, artsy culture of the time). The first piece was actually called Two Men Dancing and we performed it at the Bride on Bread Street (thank you Terry). I don’t think we initially intended to continue this collaboration but as it turned out we made a new piece about once a year for the next few years and Two Men Dancing stuck as the name of the “company” – even when it expanded to involve additional collaborators – including electronic musician Charles Cohen, Actors/Vocalists Joss Stein and Tom Bledsoe, Performers Thom and Michael Dura (twins) and Warren Muller, Dancers Tonio Guerra and Jeff McMahan, Costume Designers Daryl Mackie and Gregory Reeves, Photographer Thomas Moore, and various others.

In 1978 we created Dances ‘Round the Faggot Tree which was performed at the Philadelphia Gay Cultural Festival at the Christian Association at the University of Pennsylvania – one of the first Gay Arts festivals in the US and in 1979 we made Night Light for the second (and final) year of the Gay Arts Festival. As far as I know no video documentation exists for these early pieces.

In 1980 we did What We’re Made Of at Harold Prince at Annenberg (our only video) and then “moved” it to New York for the “First Gay American Arts Festival” at Network Theater at 49th St. and Ninth Ave. Technically this was NOT the “first” Gay American arts festival but in typical New York fashion they claimed it! Produced by The Glines (who went on to produce Torch Song

Trilogy on Broadway) and curated by Barry Laine who also wrote a major piece about us in The Advocate – the first major US monthly Gay magazine. The “final” performance of Two Men Dancing was in the fall of 1980 where we presented some excerpts of our work at PS 122’s Men Together Festival which also featured Tim Miller, John Berndt and others.

Ishmael went on to pursue his solo career. I continued to compose and perform music for other choreographers including several pieces with Edrie Ferdun and many with Melanie Stewart - both of whom I met while working as a dance accompanist at Temple University. Michael and I continued to collaborate and explore – for several years on his unique performance art pieces including Ugly Face at Temple and How I Spent My Summer Vacation at the Bride (both 1983). Then our first “musical” X-Posed in 1984 (Walnut Street Theatre Studio 5, also performed in D.C. and San Francisco). After moving to New York in 1986 we focused on some songwriting/recording projects (including various disco/dance productions); then created our “performance art musicals” of the early 90’s including Homo Love Song and Human Being which the two of us performed in New York and various other cities; and then on to our musical theatre pieces of the last 15 years including Breathe, Q, and The Cousins Grimm - where we are happy to be the writers and have others perform our work!