

“Diversity made physical”



Photo credit: Theresa Thadani

Performers:

(L to R) Laura Inserra, Michelle Fletcher, Sharon Sato, Arisika Razak, Ruth Ichinaga in Purple Moon's "When Dreams Are Interrupted..."

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"WHEN DREAMS ARE INTERRUPTED..." EVOKES STARK MEMORIES OF WWII INTERNMENT EXPERIENCE OF BAY AREA JAPANESE-AMERICANS THROUGH DANCE, MUSIC, ART & SPOKEN WORD

Site-specific work takes place at Berkeley residence of former internees Fri., Sat., Sun., Oct. 9, 10, 11 at 2 p.m.

BERKELEY, Calif.— In the world premiere of her latest work, longtime Bay Area choreographer and Purple Moon Dance Project founder Jill Togawa collaborates with a host of accomplished local artists to conjure up the “interrupted dreams,” stories and memories of Japanese Americans forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated in camps during World War II.

“When Dreams Are Interrupted...” invites us to witness the profound imprint of the mass evacuation of Japanese Americans during the war -- and the rupture of a community,” says Togawa.

The premiere of *“When Dreams Are Interrupted...”* is slated for Fri., Sat. and Sun., Oct. 9, 10 and 11 at 2 p.m. outside of Togawa’s residence at 1623 Stuart St., in south Berkeley, between McGee and California. The performance is free and open to the public, but reservations are strongly recommended for outdoor seating.

The multimedia work was inspired by Togawa's discovery of the moving story of the Nakazawa family, previous owners of her home, in what was once a thriving Japanese- and African-American neighborhood in south Berkeley. The family, along with their Japanese American neighbors, were forced into an internment camp in 1942. The garden, with a 70' tall redwood tree that the Nakazawas planted before the war, is the only thing that remains of their existence. The living tree serves as both a monument to the pain suffered by, and symbol of the strength of the Japanese American community.

Togawa is a fourth-generation *yonsei* from Hawai'i whose own connection to the internment is personal—her mother and grandparents were among 1,200 Japanese brought over from Hawai'i to be confined on the mainland in a barren, desolate camp at Heart Mountain, Wyo.

The Nakazawas' story inspired Togawa to create a work that pays tribute to the "interrupted dreams" of Japanese Americans. The performance examines the mark they left on the neighborhood, evokes personal recollections and opens a space Togawa hopes, for healing and understanding.

For this piece Togawa collaborated with Bay Area visual artist and taiko drummer Ellen Bepp of Somei Yoshino Taiko Ensemble on 3-D site design and installation; musicians Claudia Cuentas and Laura Inserra (of *Samavesha*); and dancers Michelle Fletcher, Ruth Ichinaga, Arisika Razak and Sharon Sato. Both Bepp and Ichinaga also have direct connections to internment. Members of Bepp's family and Ichinaga herself were incarcerated, the latter at a camp in Topaz, UT. Musician Pauchi Sasaki will also perform.

Says Bepp of the haunting pieces she created that give dimension and form to unspoken emotions of internees' leavings and returnings, "I felt it was important to create a sense of sacredness since this piece intends to honor the lives and spirits of the internees. To do this, I turned to certain purifying symbols used in Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan." Bepp created her own rendition of *harai gushi*, made of bamboo poles with white paper streamers folded in zig zags or *shide* flowing from their tops. "These are used in Shinto ritual purification rites to sweep away bad energies or spirits," Bepp says. In addition, the visual artist made *shimenawa*--a rice straw rope with *shide* attached, symbolizing hope and strength, forming a barrier against bad spirits. "This braided rope creates a boundary between the sacred and the profane, with a sense of strength, healing and protection provided by such amulets," Bepp explains.

With this production, Togawa comes full circle. Her first commission, by the late jazz composer Glenn Horiuchi, commemorated the 50th anniversary of the incarceration of Japanese-Americans. Togawa has formed relationships with Berkeley Methodist United Church, *Preserving California's Japantowns* project, and big band musician and historian George Yoshida, to gather background, connect the dots and authenticate historical details of the work.

Each performance will be dedicated to various members of the Japanese American community. Friday, Oct. 9's performance honors *Nikkei* who were impacted by the evacuation; Sat., Oct. 10 remembers Japanese American activist Richard Aoki, co-founder of the Black Panther Party and whose family roots are tied to the historic site,

and Sun. Oct. 11's performance pays tribute to the East Bay faith-based organizations who supported the Japanese American community before, during and after WWII.

Upon arrival at the performance, audience members will receive a blank manila shipping tag, similar to those that the U.S. military required internees to wear, identifying each by number instead of name, as they were processed into camps. The group will host an historic walking tour of south Berkeley on Sat., Sept. 12 as part of its effort to re-build community and familiarize others with the little-known and rapidly disappearing history of Japanese Americans in the area.

Tea receptions and discussions will follow the performances. If rain occurs, the production will move inside to the Berkeley Methodist United Church a few blocks away at 1710 Carleton at the corner of McGee Ave., 510/848-4680.

"When Dreams Are Interrupted..." is funded in part by Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, California Arts Council's Creating Public Value fund, California Civil Liberties Public Education Project, California Council for the Humanities, East Bay Community Foundation's East Bay Fund for Artists, Grants for the Arts/SF Hotel Tax Fund, Horizons Foundation, The California Endowment, and individual donors in the Purple Moon Galaxy.

Community supporters include Asian Improv aRts, Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center, Asian Pacific Islander Queer Women & Transgender Community (APIQWTC), Berkeley Higashi Hongwanji, Berkeley Methodist United Church (BMUC), Japanese Cultural & Community Center of Northern California (JCCNC), *Nichi Bei Times*, *Preserving California's Japantowns*, a project of the California Japanese American Community Leadership Council and Sakura Kai Senior Center.

ABOUT PURPLE MOON

Purple Moon Dance Project explores the continuum of intimacy between women and illuminates less visible, and unheard stories from our communities, through the integration of non-western and western dance forms and aesthetics, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Our mission is to contribute to transformation, peace and healing in society through the medium of dance.

For the past 10 years, Purple Moon has developed holistic programs through its Community Arts & Health Education programs, serving thousands of women of color with life-threatening illness, elders and individuals in recovery, using dance and movement to heal.

The programs are held in conjunction with the Latino Commission of the San Francisco Department of Public Health, Chinatown Public Health Center and Shanti's LifeLines. They are funded in part by: Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, the California Arts Council, Horizons Foundation, Johnson & Johnson Society for the Arts in Healthcare Partnership, SF Arts Commission, GFTA/SF Hotel Tax Fund, The California Endowment and The California Wellness Foundation.

For more information call 415-552-1105, email project@purplemoondance.org or go to www.purplemoondance.org. Purple Moon Dance Project is a 501(c)3 nonprofit; donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. ###