

# DANCE PROJECT SHEDS LIGHT ON LOVED ONES OF INCARCERATED INMATES

by Jennifer Berry

Yet to open, but already carving out a space at the intersection of civic engagement and culture, the Sing Sing Prison Museum will present a provocative dance performance that raises questions about justice and injustice. *The Wait Room*, produced by San Francisco's Flyaway Productions and co-presented with the Bethany Arts Community (BAC), is an outdoor quasi-site-specific dance that honors women who have incarcerated loved ones. The East Coast premiere will run from September 20-22 just outside of the Ossining prison, at Louis Engel Park, which is punctuated by a decommissioned guard tower and a playground that accommodates inmates' children. The outdoor

site is redolent with associations that are pertinent to the dance's themes, which expose the balancing act that women have to maintain when stripped of emotional and economic support from those who are incarcerated. The production also bears witness to the physical, psychic and emotional burden of these women who are impacted by incarceration and their simultaneous suffering and resilience.

Jo Kreiter, Flyaway Productions' founder and choreographer, and a 2019 Guggenheim Fellow, describes *The Wait Room* as her most personal work to date. Kreiter, who was the first choreographer to be named a Rauschenberg Foundation Artist-as-Activist recipient, knows first-hand

what it is like to have a husband, her child's father, in prison. While her company has always defied gravity with daring aerial performances that address social issues, this time her dancers' high wire act analogizes the instability experienced by women connected to incarcerated men. Seated in chairs that ascend, descend and twirl, the dancers will occupy a circular motorized stage that resembles a clock, which tilts wildly like a carnival ride. The sound design will syncopate their movements to edited oral histories of women recounting hardships around prison visits and their inconsistent protocols. By the conclusion of the 40-minute piece, audiences will have vicariously experienced the vertigo families are subjected to as they also "do time." In a recent interview in *In Dance Magazine*, Kreiter commented: "I really wanted to tour this piece because mass incarceration is a national crisis, and I wanted the opportunity to perform in proximity to courthouses and prisons all over the country."

Mindful of the constraints around weekend visiting hours for families of

prisoners, matinee performances are strategically set to immediately follow visiting hours, at which time shuttle buses will be provided for inmates' families to be transported to the event site. Those who are prison-impacted attend at no cost.

Preliminary events leading up to the performances are calibrated to foster empathy and dialogue by including not only the general public, but those with personal connections to prisoners, including corrections officers. These events will include a short film about the making of *The Wait Room*, including a talkback with Kreiter and her dancers (9/17); an open rehearsal (9/18); a documentary about incarceration through the eyes of children, hosted by the Ossining Public Library (9/19); and a Master Class for all levels, presented by BAC as part of Flyaway's weeklong residency (9/21).

*The Wait Room* is the first of three large-scale public art performances, collectively titled *The Decarceration Trilogy: Dismantling the Prison Industrial Complex One Dance at a Time*. **For more info, visit [thewaitroom.eventbrite.ca](http://thewaitroom.eventbrite.ca).**



*The Wait Room*, an outdoor dance program created by Flyaway Productions (photo credit: Austin Forbord)