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[JOURNAL] Nolini Barretto, Producer of New York Sitelines Festival

By gaddtastic

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Submitted by Christina Rinaldi

Nolin Barretto

Nolini Barretto's resume reads like a Who's Who of the NYC Dance Community. She worked for the [Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance](#) for thirteen years, was the Director of Marketing for [Dance Theater Workshop](#) and was the founding Director of the [Emergency Fund for Student Dancers](#). She is an Advisory Board Member for [Buglisi/Foreman Dance](#) and the Emergency Fund for Student Dancers. She is currently the Producer of the Sitelines Festival, a free site-specific choreography festival presented by the [Lower Manhattan Cultural Council](#) & the River To River Festival.

CR: Your service to the New York Dance Community is quite impressive. What lead you to a career in Arts Administration?

NB: I joined the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance to study dance, in my early twenties and worked in the office to help pay my tuition. My first full-time position there was as an entry level administrator there– I was assured that I could take as many classes as I wanted. Of course that never works – any professional dancer or dance student will tell you, it only works if you are a dancer full time. Otherwise you're just in it for fun – and I still take classes for just that reason – nothing wrong with dancing for the sheer fun of it! I worked at the Graham School for 13 years, the last few as Administrative Director of the School. I was surrounded by amazing people, dancers, students, teachers and pretty much grew up there in many ways. I left after Martha died, and the big question was "where do I go from here?"

CR: You received a Master's Degree in Arts Administration from Teachers College, Columbia University. What are the advantages of going back to school for a degree in Arts Administration?

NB: I figured that if I did a Masters in Arts Admin, it would open up new and different possibilities for me. And it did. Soon after I graduated, I was hired as the Marketing Director of Dance Theater Workshop – another amazing place!

A program like the MA at Teachers College works better the more experience you have in the field because you can relate your theoretical study with real-world problems and situations that you have already encountered. It makes more sense and really helps hone your skills. That program also allows you to tailor your study to areas that you are particularly interested in – there are many, many, many electives that you can fulfill by taking courses campus-wide. And here's a word to the older students – going back to school is great! Study is so much easier than some work situations – and it's a joy to realize that your brain still works! I left the program with straight A's. I loved being there!

And also of course, a cohort program puts you in the middle of a tight network of arts professionals. It's great to have friends in arts organizations everywhere – just an email away – makes partnerships much easier to effect.

CR: The Dance/NYC Youth Advisory Committee often discusses the many challenges plaguing our Dance Community. What do you think are some of the obstacles the Dance Community currently faces? Do you have any thoughts on how we can improve our current situation?

NB: Certainly as a presenter, the biggest obstacle today are the shrinking funds available. Our season had to be shortened this year, as so many other presenting programs were forced to do. But I am happy to say that the commissioning amounts we give choreographers is a little more than it has been in the past. Partnerships are the way to go when funds are short. LMCC's Sitelines is partnering with DTW to present Pat Graney at Governors Island next year. We're continually considering various partnerships to stretch the commissioning and marketing dollar.

CR: Since the events of 9/11, do you feel the climate has improved in Lower Manhattan? In particular, has it impacted the amount of dance presented in lower Manhattan?

NB: It most definitely has improved post 9/11. Lower Manhattan is no longer a ghost town, audiences come down in droves – last weekend we presented Zvi Gotheimer at Fort Jay, and for some shows, Zvi was concerned that we had too many people to move around! Nice problem to have, isn't it? Of course now we're in the middle of another, way different crisis. The economy. And you do feel it a bit more down in the Financial District.

There is certainly more dance being presented downtown – and the great news is that most of it is free to the public. There are fewer theatres down here compared to the rest of the city – but there's dance. You see it at Dance New Amsterdam, World Financial Center, Battery Dance performs at Chase Plaza, River to River presents Evening Stars, and of course Sitelines is everywhere Downtown – throughout the summer.

CR: Where did the idea for Sitelines originate?

NB: When I founded the series, I was actually the Marketing Director at LMCC. We were trying to get residents and workers in Lower Manhattan to attend our events – but it just wasn't happening. This was 2002 and after work, people would head to the bars, the gym or straight home. They weren't coming to LMCC events. I told Liz Thompson, who was then the Executive Director of LMCC that we're going to have to present work right where people work and live, so that they bump into these performances – sort of accidentally discover them. It would make people here see their everyday spaces transformed – they'd experience their city differently. Liz said go ahead and the first season was so successful, that we hired another Marketing Director, and curating and producing Sitelines became my full-time preoccupation.

CR: What is the process for selecting choreographers? Is there an application process or an Advisory Board to help make decisions?

NB: Like most presenting series, selection of choreographers is done by one person – the curator or artistic director. It's difficult to construct a balanced season by committee – and I don't know if it's even desirable. We have to take risks, we have to trust our judgment, we have to know our artists and their work, and we have to be personally invested up to the hilt! I think that kind of do or die commitment is necessary and desirable in decision making.

That said, the process of selecting is not a closed one – to the contrary. Like most presenters, I see more performances per week than our spouses would like us to! I follow artists whose work I admire over the course of years. I try to see everything that site-specific artists do in NYC. So yes, there are some people I invite to send in a site-based performance proposal. But now that Sitelines has been around for 6 years, artists who are interested in site work, will often email me with concepts and ideas. I meet with them, and talk through the possibilities and viability of the project. This season, we're presenting an artist that I didn't know personally, but whose concept and proposal was so compelling that I had to have it be part of the Sitelines season. So yes, choreographers, be fearless about contacting presenters with your ideas – but think it through well, research, give details, the why and for me, the where. And, invite us to see your work – few presenters will take the risk of commissioning work unless they can trust the ability of the choreographer to pull it off and deliver a compelling performance.

CR: How does Sitelines obtain permission to hold performances at some of our city's busiest and most famous locations?

NB: Whew – that's the toughest part of my job – though it is getting somewhat easier after all these years. It helps that LMCC is closely connected via its Board and President to people in leadership positions and real estate all over Lower Manhattan. It helps that LMCC has a reputation as a known entity that promotes the work of artists. And it helps that Sitelines now has a history of presenting dance in a variety of high visibility spots in Lower Manhattan. But, there are so many varieties of spaces and kinds of ownership down here. Privately owned public spaces, corporate spaces: public spaces permitted by Parks and Rec or by the city, or Federal – sometimes all three in one area. It is a maze best navigated by an organization steeped in the history of downtown! Nonetheless, each year has surprise challenges: this year a privately owned public space that we thought would be a natural for a site-work – like so many we've performed in before (whose employees loved what they saw) – just did not want us there, because of the attention we'd bring – they're just very conservative! On the other hand, we're presenting Naomi Goldberg Haas' company next week at the Staten Island Ferry Terminal – which I thought would be difficult to get, but DOT has been unbelievable supportive of the project. One just never knows – and sometimes we just have to work every contact we've got!

For more information on Sitelines 2009, please visit

<http://www.lmcc.net/art/programs/2009/sitelines/index.html>

Produced in association with the River To River Festival

<http://www.rivertorivernyc.com/>

Tags: Arts Administration, Sitelines Festival, curation and presenting

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