

THE POWER OF PERFORMANCE

F★R★E★E



PRESS KIT

"An uplifting colorful documentary" – San Francisco Chronicle

"FREE particularly stands out" – San Jose Mercury News

"David Collier's beautifully photographed images of [Oakland] and an original soundtrack by Todd Boekelheide add to the film's impact." – Piedmont Post

A Documentary Film by David Collier & Suzanne LaFetra

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LOGLINE

FREE : The Power of Performance follows five courageous teenagers as they spend a life-changing year with the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company in Oakland, California. Using dance and spoken word, the teens learn to transform their stories of personal struggle and hardship into a powerful and liberating year-end production.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Each year, a diverse group of teens audition for one of twenty coveted spots in the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company, an afterschool dance and arts program in Oakland, California, where they will spend months working together to create a stage production based on their life stories. But in a city plagued by violence and high student dropout rates, can the youth find a safe haven?

FREE : The Power of Performance follows five of the Oakland teenagers selected to be in the company through an emotional and life-changing year as they share their stories of personal struggle and hardship. Jamany, who once thought guns, violence and drugs were the way to fit in, barely escapes juvenile hall. Tilly has little outlet for the pain of a difficult relationship with her girlfriend and resorts to cutting. Nee Nee lives with her mother, who has breast cancer and can't afford to pay the water bill. Alaysia is trying to cope with the trauma of a childhood rape. Omar, who has been through eleven foster homes, is faced with a devastating diagnosis.

Amid the ups and downs of auditioning, crafting a show, rehearsing and performing, the youth find voice and a sense of belonging. Under the careful guidance of Destiny's artistic director Sarah Crowell, their journey reveals how collaborative art can cultivate strength, resilience and hope.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Jittery teens hold hands backstage waiting to give the performance of their lives. Who they are, where they've come from, and what they want to become—their stories shape the show.

"That curtain is about to go up and something in you is about to let go. This will set you free," says Sarah Crowell, Artistic Director of the Destiny Arts Center in Oakland, California.

Capturing the raw beauty and powerful grace of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company, an after-school dance and performing arts program for underserved youth, **F R E E : The Power of Performance** journeys behind the curtain to spotlight the intimate stories of five Oakland teenagers. They will spend months script-writing, rehearsing and participating in meditation circles as they transform their narratives for the stage. But when they are exposed to violent crime, economic hardship, and other challenges of urban and family life, can the youth find peace?

Nee Nee shares a bedroom (and a bed) with her mother in a small apartment, along with her brother and his baby. When her mother struggles with breast cancer, Nee Nee takes on more responsibilities than the average teen.

At twelve, Jamany thought guns, violence and drugs were the way to fit in. *"Without a father to show me how to live my life,"* he says, *"I turned to the streets."*

Omar has lived in eleven foster homes. He recently was adopted and lives with *"two Caucasian females,"* he giggles, describing his moms. *"It just sounds funny when I say it out loud."*

Alaysia is in the painful process of prosecuting a man who raped her. *"You feel gross sometimes. You just want it to all go away,"* she says, her voice breaking.

Tilly struggles in a turbulent relationship, and the pain causes her to cut herself. *"Friends at school, you can't really trust them,"* Tilly cautions. *"You can, at Destiny."*

Troubled by social and economic disparities, Sarah chose to work with youth rather than pursue a professional dance career. Her work centers on enabling young people to find peace, safety and self-love, when their environments may dictate otherwise, *"so that they can come through adolescence shiny, and not broken,"* she says.

The newly formed company begins its first team building exercise:

If you really knew me...

you would know that I have been homeless...

that I was shot when I was eight...

that my dad verbally abused us...

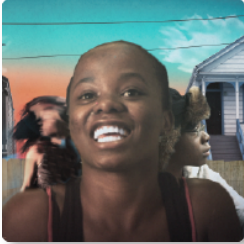
The process of building the show is intense. The youth are responsible for script writing, costume design and choreography. The show matures through thought-provoking writing exercises.

During a writing workshop, Tilly reads aloud a poem she wrote: *"I am sitting on a sidewalk because my people don't want me...there's a sign taped to my forehead that reads F R E E."* Eyes sparkle and "F R E E : Voices From Beyond the Curbside" begins to coalesce.

Through the months of rehearsals, the young people face issues at home. Alaysia pushes herself to confront her perpetrator. Tilly struggles with loneliness. Jamany shares more about his life on the streets. Nee Nee, uncertain about what's next in her life, half-heartedly turns to an Air Force recruiter. Omar, who has taken a lead role in the show, suddenly disappears. When he finally returns to Destiny, he reveals a devastating secret. Sarah holds his hand. *"You have a community, and we aren't going to let you fall,"* she affirms.

As opening night approaches, the tension builds. Kids trip over each other, fling scripts to the ground in frustration and flub their entrances. Even Sarah worries: will they be ready when the curtain goes up? Finally, it's show time, and the beauty of their courage and hard work is unveiled, with each teen sharing their story in dance and spoken word. Performing doesn't make their problems disappear, but shining a light on their experiences helps them to find meaning in their struggles. As Sarah puts it, *"Telling the truth is better in the long run, even if it hurts coming out."*

THE TEENS



Nee Nee

"I like to push myself to do things that really girls shouldn't do or can't do. I want to be the girl who does it."



Jamany

"I don't know where I would be without dancing. I wouldn't know myself, I wouldn't know my breaking point. I wouldn't know how to calm down. Without dancing, I would be scared of myself."



Omar

"...I was still hiding behind what people wanted me to be. I was scared to show who I really was."



Alaysia

"You gotta learn to forgive, because if you always have anger in your heart and stuff, like you'll just live a bitter life."



Tilly

"I'm alone a lot. I have friends at school but you can't always trust them. You can at Destiny."

ABOUT DESTINY

Destiny Arts Center is an afterschool program in Oakland, California, with a mission to inspire and ignite social change through the arts. For 27 years, the nonprofit has worked with youth to end isolation, prejudice and violence.



The nationally recognized Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company performs for up to 25,000 audience members annually. Their 2016 production *Seed Language: a new identity* showed to sold out audiences at A.C.T. in San Francisco. The program was a National Arts Youth and Humanities Program award finalist in 2015 and a current National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) grantee.

Artistic Director and DAYPC Co-Founder Sarah Crowell's 25 plus years of inspiring leadership at Destiny Arts has garnered her awards and accolades both locally and nationally. In 2016, she was inducted into the Alameda County Women's Hall of Fame and was a finalist for a Tony Award for Excellence in Theater Education.

To learn more about **Destiny Arts Center**: www.destinyarts.org

FESTIVALS & AWARDS



Film Festivals

Mill Valley Film Festival
 SF IndieFest
 Oakland International Film Festival
 Mendocino Film Festival
 Middlebury New Filmmakers Festivals
 Napa Valley Film Festival
 Women's International Film & Arts Festival
 Orlando Film Festival
 Ojai Film Festival
 UNAFF (United Nations Association Film Festival)
 Richmond Diversity Film Festival
 Dances with Films
 My Hero International Film Festival

Awards

Mill Valley Film Festival - Active Cinema Gold Award
 My Hero International Film Festival - 1st Place, Excerpt
 SF IndieFest - Audience Award, Best Documentary
 Nominee, 2015 Media for a Just Society Award

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Director/Producer

Suzanne LaFetra is an award-winning freelance writer, journalist and filmmaker. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including the San Francisco Chronicle, the Christian Science Monitor, The Sun and on KQED fm. She is the Executive Producer of the documentary film, *She Wants to be a Matador* (2009). Suzanne has long believed in the power of film as a medium for social change. Being the mom and stepmom to four teens has made her particularly keen on the youth development work portrayed in *F R E E*. This is her directorial debut.

Director/Producer/Director of Photography

David Collier is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, and the principal and founder of Studio B Films, a video production company in Berkeley, California. Straight out of college, David directed and produced *For Better or For Worse*, a film that explores the lives and relationships of five feisty couples married for fifty years or longer. It earned him several awards, including an Academy Award® nomination, and has led him to a wonderful range of documentary jobs for PBS, BBC, Discovery, MTV and Animal Planet. David sees his work as a license to be curious. His projects have taken him not only to amazing places, but also into the lives of incredible people and organizations around the world.



Editor

Jennifer Chinlund is an award-winning editor. She has edited dozens of documentary films including *Children of the Amazon*, *The Self Made Man*, *Discovering Dominga*, *Baby It's You*, and *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter*, which won an Emmy and was nominated for an Academy Award. Other broadcast credits include *Secrets of Silicon Valley* and *Beyond the Call*, both on Independent Lens; *Coming to Light*, *Edward S. Curtis* and the *North American Indian*, on American Masters; and *Ishi, the Last Yahi*, on PBS's American Experience. Her films have been shown at many international film festivals, including Sundance, Berlin, San Francisco, Telluride Mountainfilm and Tribeca.

Composer

Todd Boekelheide started working in film in 1974 at American Zoetrope, Francis Ford Coppola's production company in San Francisco. He left Zoetrope in 1976 and over the next few years edited picture and sound, became interested in writing music for films, and began music studies at Mills College in Oakland. As he developed his film scoring career, he also specialized as a rerecording mixer, winning an Oscar for mixing the music on *Amadeus* in 1984. He has scored several feature films, including *Dim Sum* and *Nina Takes a Lover* and numerous documentaries, notably *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* and *Ballets Russes*. In 1999 he won an Emmy for his score for the documentary *Kids of Survival: The Life and Art of Tim Rollins and the KOS*. In 2007 he was nominated for an Emmy for his score for *Boffo! Tinseltown's Bombs and Blockbusters*, and in 2010 he was nominated for another Emmy, this time for the score for *Blessed is the Match*. Up-to-date credits information can be found at www.tobo-music.com.

Co-Producer & Distribution Manager

Sara Needham is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and journalist who enjoys telling stories that not only open hearts and minds but also have the ability to bring about collective change. She has explored a variety of topics ranging from genetically modified food, to California politics, to gun violence, to the colorful life story of a Gregorian friar. Her work has appeared on PBS, in film festivals worldwide, online, and in living rooms & classrooms. She believes successful distribution comes about when a film is given a path that allows it to open up conversations and make a difference in the world.

CREDITS

Produced and Directed by

Suzanne LaFetra and David Collier

Director of Photography

David Collier

Edited by

Jennifer Chinlund

Original Music by

Todd Boekelheide

Co-Producer

Sara Needham

Featuring

Alaysia Brooks

Omar Evans

Renysa "Nee Nee" Franklin

Natalie "Tilly" Reclosado

Jamany Sneed

Sarah Crowell

Rashidi Omari

The Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company

Chloe Alston

Dorianna Blitt

Kiana Brown

Richie Domingo

Amber Espinosa-Jones

Zoe Huey

Jasmine "Mikki" Johnson

Chyna Kane-Ross

Jalena Keane-Lee

Ellen Kobori

Ejahye Lyons-Clark

Julia Philips

Djanai Love

Sasha Peterson

Alan Purify-Wright

Yaneivi Quinn

Anisha Ragland

Dazia Robinson

Cleopatra Stevens

Also Appearing

Jackie Bruckman

Brittany Davis

Tashanique Hankins

Matthew Melendez

Jacqueline Oriabure

Denice Simpson

Lauren Stevenson

Ronnie Osborne

Shar Rednour

Cathy Rivers Smith

Antanique Sneed

Sergeant K. Sutphen

Aaron Young

Additional Camera

Vincent Huergas

Alrik Bursell

Shaleece Haas

Carmen Osterley

Joe Wolohan

Miles Burke

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Kevin Oliver

Darcel Walker

John Churchman

Jeremiah Moore

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Sara Needham

Production Assistants

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Chelsea Walton
Kyung Lee

Assistant Editing

Julien de Benedictis

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Alrik Bursell
Dan Williams
Joseph Shafer

Archival Research

Patti Tauscher

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Lauren Stevenson

Archival photograph courtesy of

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Tilly Reclosado

Sound design

John Nutt

Rerecording Mixer

Mark Berger
Recorded at Skywalker Sound

Colorist

Gary Coates | Colorflow

Title Design by

STUDIO B FILMS

“Save Me”

Words and music by Warren Felder,
Onika Tanya Maraj and Andrew Wansel
(c) SONGS OF UNIVERSAL, INC. ON BEHALF OF
HARAJUKU BARBIE MUSIC, AND MONEY MACK
MUSIC (BMI)
Performed by Nicki Minaj
Courtesy of Cash Money Records, Inc./
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Marketing and Outreach Coordinator

Jessica Jones

Outreach and Distribution Producer

Sara Needham

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PRESS & REVIEWS

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FILM STILLS



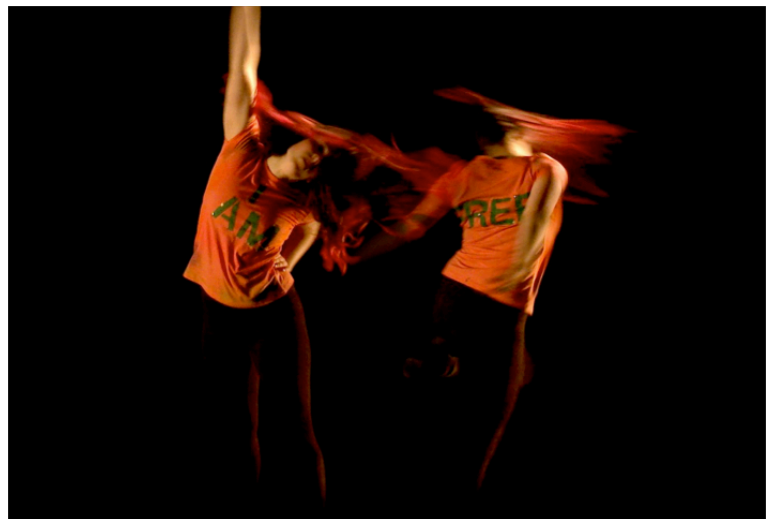
In the clouds Courtesy of F R E E
Design by Liz Feder



Jamany and Alan Jumping
Photographer: Lauren Stevenson



Rashidi Jumping
Photographer: Lauren Stevenson

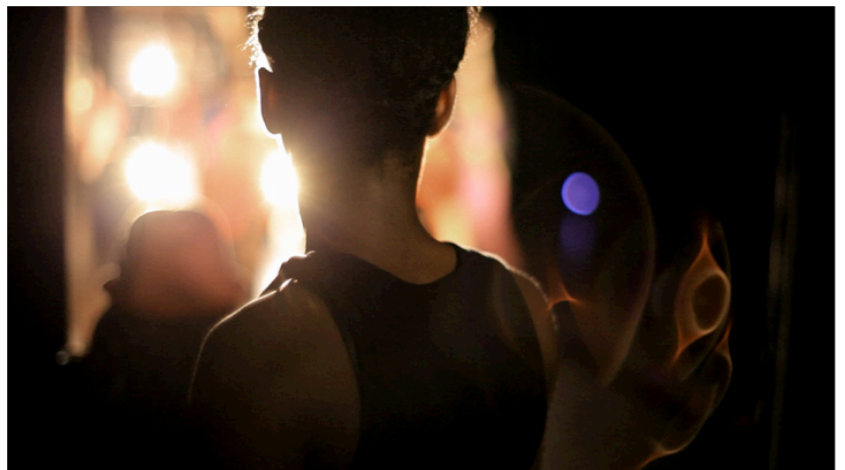


I am F R E E Courtesy of F R E E
Design by Liz Feder

PRESS KIT



Alaysia
Courtesy of F R E E



In the wings
Courtesy of F R E E



Studio Jump
Courtesy of F R E E