

Alice Heyward

Performing Formats:

HYPERLANDS



Fig. 1. Contextual image for iruuu's *[musical.(function Transform(){blau}*(euph.OR.i.[a](NGE)))]*, presented at Acker Stadt Palast, Berlin, 2017, curated by M.l/mi1glissé (Groups and Individuals). Photo Lindsey Cammack



Audio documentation of *[musical.(function Transform(){blau}*(euph.OR.i.[a](NGE)))]* (2017)
https://archive.org/details/live_musicalblau_euphoriange
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On Sunday May 7, 2017 [*musical.(function Transform(){blau}*(euph.OR.i.[a](NGE)))*]; a 9-hour performance event directed by iruuu (a.k.a Lindsey Cammack) was presented at Acker Stadt Palast in Berlin. The event was curated by independent gallery project M.I/mi1glissé (a.k.a Groups and Individuals) as part of a variety of autonomous, interconnected artist projects from February-May. Each project was presented within a distinct frame of time and space—referred to as “TIME/SPACE”—that set the conditions for a format to perform with the artwork it hosted.

In both M.I/mi1glissé’s curation and this text, TIME/SPACE is a concept referring to the materiality of a format. A “performing format” is an active, collaborating subject made of temporal and spatial matter. In M.I/mi1glissé’s single immersive curatorial framework, performances, exhibitions, installation, texts, temporary events and durational artworks using multiple theatrical/exhibition/online formats all occurred, representing entries by multiple authors. Within this anatomy, each invited work was a self-determined creation and each TIME/SPACE a dynamic, embodied format producing interactive hospitality. Whether white-cube gallery, black-box theatre, online dialogue-boxes or sound-and-image threads, the various “performing formats” explored in the project’s series are “more than just the contextual setting in which they are found. Viewed from the ‘prism of performing’, these artworks ... develop more seriously the potential to propel into multiple versions via an intentional performing of the format” (Mu 2017).

What is “intentionally performing the format” and what can it produce? By mediating a format’s conventions, the borders that form it emerge and reveal figures of separation that construct our being in the world. Possibilities to interact with these lines of separation appear, producing transformations between divisions of public/private, subject/object, nature/culture, performer/audience or artwork/visitor, and also between formats themselves, e.g. exhibition/performance. Encountering these edges allows other experiences of their conventions—of “‘the open,’ where what is to come is not yet—is not fixed by teleology or function ... and might still be otherwise”—rather than conventional experience (Harraway 2010). A performing format expands an artwork into its potentiality, generating other realisations of itself.

[musical.(function Transform(){blau}(euph.OR.i.[a](NGE)))*]; was resolutely irresolute, dilating and inflating in a ‘performing’ black box theatre. Its form? Musical theatre combining song, spoken dialogue, drama and dance, structured with iruuu’s experimental noise music. It was a musical without the demands or expectations the form conventionally assumes. Rhythmical and code-generated with feedback and coil relays, music tracks were performed with the dimension of an infinite landscape.

My long-term teacher and colleague, Australian dancer and choreographer Becky Hilton often speaks about entering a dance class or a performance as you might a foreign country. What’s its culture? What are the codes? How do I relate and navigate? What changes and how do I change? In this work, we entered a particular spatio-temporality and environment that asked these questions, without any promise of a future. What lay beyond the threshold

was accessed through a process of *undoing* our roles, which were incorporated by the format as material to transform.

The situation offered itself like a borderless nation, inviting us in, producing questions and self-inquiry for us to collectively “world” experiences. “Worlding,” for feminist author and scholar Donna Haraway, is to form relations not *in* the world but *of* the world, through interactions between different bodies, technologies and knowledge. Like in science fiction worlds, this work was not a prescribed container like a country, but instead *of worlds*, composed of patternings, risky co-makings and speculative fabulations.

Acker Stadt Palast is a former chocolate factory squatted by artists after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is one of the few remaining stylistic and historical relics of the previous decades located in the heart of the now thoroughly gentrified neighbourhood of Mitte. The theatre is a modest, grungy black box established on the connection between contemporary dance and new music—a supportive host for *[musical.(function Transform(){blau}*(euph.OR.i.[a](NGE)))];* a wild and undomesticated event emerging in the middle of nowhere in continual transformation to an endless somewhere. In this setting, the event became another kind of “black box” (concept), evoking a myriad of colours and shapes outside and beyond “black” and “box”.

Romanian artist Florin Flueraş writes in his text “BLACK BOX,” published in the edited book *BLACK HYPERBOX*, about a “black box” concept (as opposed to the theatrical format) as “a device that allows a transition to another world, something like a black hole or wormhole ... an ideal black box not only transports you to another world, it transforms you on the way ... mutat[ing] subjectivity in order to be produced and perceived” (Flueraş 2016, 25–26). In *[musical.*, in the black box theatre, another enigmatic black box became apparent that “produce(d) an explanatory void that force(d) thinking and speculative explorations” (17).

Audiences came and went from the dimly lit, lo-fi production space. We sat on cushions laced with peanuts and rotten fish along the walls or on ascending theatre platforms; the panorama of a galactic cave space. It felt a bit like sitting in the “halle” (chill zone) of a club, where sounds and images rise, fall and merge around bodies in waves and spirals. Emotions and ideas coursed through my veins, charging and dying in cyclical loops, entering and influencing the situation. In this nebulous field, our spectating bodies became like electronic agents, yielding to content we steadily absorbed which then radiated into the space in surges of feeling and sensation.

With prior experience at the venue as both performer and audience member, I was confronted with my relationship to “theatre”: conventionally a performance addressed to anonymous spectators. Here, another negotiation was suggested, perhaps through employing a mode of address typical of visual art conventions, in which an artwork performs with and without visitors as they come and go.

When poet, writer and painter Henri Michaud was asked at what time the paintings in the Louvre were at their best, he responded: “Obviously when the museum is closed, because then the sculptures and paintings can enjoy themselves and be together” (quoted by Spångberg 2017, 12). In this live work, the estranging distance between artwork and visitor was undone: at closing time, everything—we/us/landscape—dissolved in the transition, instead of the venue promptly shutting up shop, sending us home, reinforcing this separation. The quality of an indifferent landscape brought us into play as beautifully impartial, contingent and subjective companions to the work, who participate without force.

Swedish choreographer Mårten Spångberg says in relation to his work *The Planet*:

the planet ... is indifferent. It is fundamentally indifferent to us; it minds its own business. The planet is this *nothing*—something that is absolutely indifferent ... it is something that we cannot experience. We cannot read it. My experience is of the planet, but I cannot understand what this experience is. The experience of being non-differentiated is both the moment of absolute terror but it is also the moment in which everything is possible. (Bozicnik, Zimmerman, and Spångberg 2016).

It was on this threshold of absolute terror and possibility in this indifferent universe that I had an experience of *something*. The event’s durational, committed indifference towards a fixed outcome allowed the evolving performance to overcome its strong visual representation and “look” of amateur theatre. I was able to move past this surface and into the gritty, rich and sensational core; beyond *my* surface that automatically makes these identifications and judgements.

Over time, the event’s situation became its subject. An experiencing subject. These experiences became our experiences. *We* became the subject, *we* became the situation. Being there became *worlding*, where “ontological choreography” (feminist science studies scholar Charis Thompson’s term) “remains ... in play and in labor, where who and what are to be are forged in thick and deep times and places” (Haraway 2010). From black holes to great heights, planes of pleasure, amusement and boredom appeared in mutating scales including our thoughts, sensations, feelings and desires in the choreography: a meeting of all participating bodies.

Polish-born, Berlin-based choreographer Agata Siniarska’s choreographic practice shares something of this complexity, positioning the solo form always as a group act. Her most recent work, *The Soft Act of Killing* (2017), on which I collaborated for her graduation of her Master of Arts Solo/Dance/Authorship (SODA) at HZT – Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin, states in spoken text:

This is not a solo work. This a group performance.
I hate participatory art! But what cannot kill you, makes you stronger.

It is about doing it WITH and so I am going to DIWO – “do it with others”.
(Siniarska 2017)

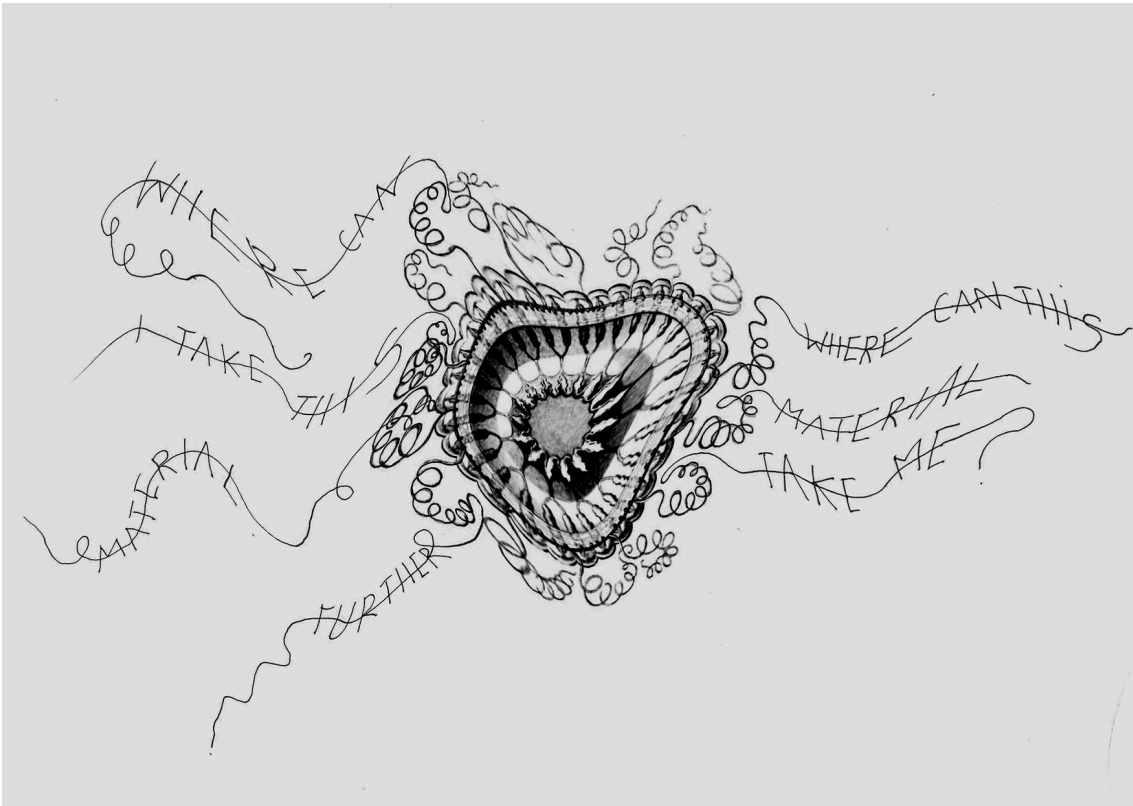


Fig. 2. Promotional image for Agata Siniarska's *A Soft Act of Killing* (2017). © Salomé Genés, illustrator

Another of her works, *HYPERDANCES* (2015), as its title suggests, stretches, indeed, explodes and eliminates the boundaries of its material, format and authorship by delving as deep as possible into their foundations. Reacting to the democratisation of Western dance in the 60s, when its contemporary forms opened to daily gestures and amateur performers, it is a work that questions how current problematics can build our thinking about the form, and posits 'Dance', now, to be a field as expansive as the whole Earth. It declares:

Let a dance happen in a huge scale!
Therefore no longer street / stage / museum, but the whole Earth!
Not only human bodies, but the entanglements of human and non-human
vibrating matter
No collective action, but an infinite multiplicity of tangles.
Not Dolly Parton but Dolly the sheep. (Siniarska 2015)

Siniarska's choreographic practice facetiously frames dance and performance as forces produced not by “dancing” and “performing,” but cells, bacteria, radiation, air and earthquakes as (re)active agents that impact the performer and audience in a group production.

Her unfolding body of work, like *[musical.]*, proposes dynamic contingency between all kinds of bodies and matter; entanglements not contained but produced by the situations they constitute on a limitless, planetary scale.



Fig. 3. Promotional image for Agata Siniarska's *HYPERDANCES* (2015)

Dance is a *hyperactive* force, non-differentiated, indeterminate, that “includes, doesn't control”. I often hear the imperative form of these three quoted words looping in my mind like a mantra. It is a worded attention-directive, part of various scores and practices of dancer Chrysa Parkinson, entered into my “world” through studio practice with dancer-choreographer Eleanor Bauer. Dance produces knowledge. It “worlds,” contaminates and entangles. Material accumulates, circulates and transforms in transmissions through different times, matter, bodies and spaces, “in play and in labor” together (Haraway 2010).

“Choreography blurs the distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, chance and order, flesh and information ... [It] disperses individuals—into body parts, gestures, and

movements—and reassembles them into groups, patterns, systems, and worlds” (Love 2015). In *[musical]*, a scoring system produced “storms” understood as events that alter environments and characters to transform the story through entanglements of ideas, gestures, and performative subjectivities. Often represented by one or two characters from the main narrative arc, they emerged as entirely new events, combining characters from different scenarios, creating a web or network through time in which recognisable logic or linear progression disappeared. Storms became means for performers to develop their own ideas as subjects, making contributions outside the content in iruuu’s script of irrational action and dialogue for the characters (‘Mr. Fishy’, ‘L’(ost) enfant’ and ‘Swirled Peas’, as examples), forming new relations in what we perceived.

The entire event simulated a kind of production system that gave form to sub-terrestrial narratives and events moving from day into night. A freaky, action-packed, never-ending musical nativity play, without the address, agenda or representation of one. A series of vamped denotative scenes—mysterious, twisted, absurd, all affected, self-expressive and dramatic—whose singular implications blurred in passing leaving traces of an overall *something*. Violence, celebration, conflict, death, birth and dances as material units performed after one another, appearing “impartially” like the newsfeed on your Facebook homepage; each ostensibly extraneous yet bound by an invisible, unknown algorithm of relation.

I sat and melted into the landscape, taking pleasure in my lack of understanding of how each event became another in the unpredictable, nonsensical, kaleidoscopic dramaturgy of sound and vision. It ploughed on through a lost chronology. Some in the audience became indignant, declining the invitation to share/spend/waste TIME/SPACE in this indifferently communal way. I rested in the halle, allowing hypnosis. It looked like a kind of “bad theatre” but felt, smelt and sounded like something else: unresolved indeterminacy. Sometimes a scene was replaced in my experience by a coincidental detail of equal importance, like a sequin fallen on the floor, a-rhythmically sparkling light in the landscape and I’d think about something else, again.

Through its extended duration, unconventional to the usual event-temporality of theatre, another sense of community was created, one not so anonymous. Spectating this work involved sleeping, leaving, smoking, returning, chatting, texting, laughing, slumping on each other, feeling alone, together, lost, sensing the gentle, revolting presence of the dead fish and crunchy nuts under our bodies, thinking about love, touch, taste, that girl over there... and on it went in circles, with a sensation or quality of life.

It offered no solutions, answers or aspirations, merely the promise of an (in)different engagement. Despite its fullness, what emerged was an attractive emptiness: “The aesthetic encounter is neither distance nor sharing, nor background or foreground but is emerging precisely in the indivisibility of opposites” (Spångberg 2017, 11). Like in a dream, when you’re both the subject and witness to your own experience of a situation within a frame that stretches and compresses as you and it move in and out of each other.

The artists contributed and diffused heterogeneous knowledge, logics and skills from other form(at)s to playfully perform the theatre. And so emerged a curious confusion; an uncanny experience; a queer temporality; a hyper space. Not a “hybrid” but a “hyper-theatre.” The “hyper space” arrived through its “hyper relation” to a format, creating the potential for the work to expand beyond its locale and conventions to be entirely situated *somewhere* in the great big *nowhere* of potentiality. Or, *nowhere* in a *somewhere*? It is through a work’s interactive relation to a format and its conventions that a kind of transcendence occurs.

[musical.(function Transform(){blau}(euph.OR.i.[a](NGE)))]*; went beyond representation of its subjects and created an ontology of its own. Like in *The Exterminating Angel* (Luis Buñuel, 1962) where guests find themselves perplexingly unable to leave a never-ending dinner party and spiral into fascinating confusion at the mercy of their own scenario, composed (of) themselves. The performance transpired as its own birthing and funeral party, arriving and departing in transformation, deep in the belly of the black box which it transfigured into a sunken, neon cave-space of everything and nothing at once; and we know that nothing is something.

As part of the 20th Biennale of Sydney (BoS) in June 2016, Israeli choreographer-performer Lilach Livne presented *TRANSCENDING, for Peace* (2016) in which I performed together with Lilach, Andrew Haining, Shahmen Suku and Moran Sivan at Critical Path. Livne’s artistic research deals, as she puts it, with “the dangers of the seen,” the politics of the image and the way our bodies represented in the world affect the way we see, think and relate to ourselves and “the other”—our images, our bodies, other subjects.

Her practice, like the curatorial relations spawned by M.I, is multiplex, a continuous work(ing) that reshapes itself in diverse formats, always in/as a form of devised collective prayer. In each realisation—prayer gathering or performance, online prayer, workshop or prayer book publication—audience and performers meet each other, join forces and perform a choreography that calls for the “abstract” to reshape our perception of “the other”; to experience the “non-image.” She applies “abstraction” as both notion and material; something to pray for and to pray with. She speculates:

Maybe it’s the next level of politic identities, embracing ‘the abstract’ as a political agenda, striving for a place (where) we can be many things at the same time, and not one limited thing related to the way we appear in the images world. (Livne 2017)

Livne’s work invites its participants to practice complexity and extremism through a series of rituals designed to reach a new consciousness. The events that manifest the work in each iteration ask: how can “abstraction” be employed as a process in dance and performance, where the body is a tool for the images seen by an audience?



Fig. 4. Performance documentation of Lilach Livne's *Transcending, for Peace*, presented as part of the 20th Biennale of Sydney at Critical Path, Sydney, 2016. Photo by Tal Haring

For the particular frame of the BoS, we developed a choreography that mediated separations between roles, relations and participation in a layered, subverted process of prayer. This iteration's TIME/SPACE was an evening-length performance (at 7pm and 9pm, for approximately 2 hours) in a studio formatted with objects, light and moving group structures as a communal space to host a mass prayer action that we facilitated to produce a shared encounter.

Performing *TRANSCENDING, for Peace* is to move through a ritual. It is carried through processes intended to transform between physical and transcendent "worlds." In Sydney, we worked with the aim to touch the "flatness" of our bodies, confronting their visual representations as raw containers: their appearances, histories and self-performances. We experienced the conventional relation of our bodies spectated by an anonymous audience. We became "flat" like Nijinsky in *The Rite of Spring*, scanning and projecting our bodies' surfaces onto a screen.

Hey bitches,
Let's be a dot for a while

In our hyper-image-obsessed culture,
Where we become a sign of a human being.
We are too cynical,
Too out of our bodies.

I want to reach an existential trip.

I don't want to have illusions anymore. (Livne 2016)

Continuing, we performed procedures to transcend beyond body/self, me/you, us/ them binaries. We constructed a realm of the “non-image” by covering the body as practised in Islam and Orthodox Judaism, together with the audience. In this shared, “hidden” and provocative zone, other divisions emerged which the performance worked to blur and dissolve. What does it mean to cover/dematerialise the body with such a culturally heavy image that we each have a different relationship to in contemporary politics? Through practices of energetic interrelation and transmission, we attempted to go beyond these images, their identities and definitions by departing from our bodies—their registers and meanings—to sense what else could constitute a being, a body, a world, beyond visuality.

To rise above my shape,
 To meet in unfamiliar dimensions.
 Let my trip be real,
 With no illusions, shadows or projections.
 Let the cynicism disappear,
 Into new forms of the endless. (Livne 2016)

Transcending back into a world of seen images, an experience of “the abstract” became tangible, as real as the concrete countenance of things that we live and experience daily, opening to a new kind of consciousness in “a landscape where we are not narrowed to our image, in any layer of being” (Livne 2017). Each being for themselves—together—in interrelated independence. Not totally joined, but never fully apart. Negotiating joining and separation, where we begin and end.

To feel the ground
 To strip what hides and covers
 To remove the weight of my image
 I hope it is not so dangerous to see. (Livne 2016)

TRANSCENDING, for Peace continues to take multiple shapes in many times and spaces, some with my participation: the 20th BoS; a Skype performance whereby Lilach, Moran, Shahmen, Andrew and I met for an online prayer, simultaneously presented and documented on the web; and in a workshop I assisted this year at Impulstanz Vienna. Each format performs with its own specificity, treating the material in new ways. The printed prayer books exist simultaneously as a blueprint and archive for any/all bodies/selves to activate in any TIME/SPACE.

Writer Gertrude Stein is said to have found drama boring because of the necessity to make acquaintances with characters, then sympathise with them. She preferred landscapes because they're passive until you enter them, then they activate around you: "You don't need to befriend landscapes and most of all they don't guide you to some other destination. The landscape is indifferent to you" (Spångberg 2017, 11). Like a landscape that offers nothing but itself, Livne's *TRANSCENDING, for Peace* does not promise its title will be experienced but provides a framework of roles to play, undo and witness in the encounters it facilitates, each time producing something else as we aim towards an experience of abstraction.

Another "Spanbergianism"¹ for good measure:

In art, the aesthetic experience is one that goes beyond what we have the capacity for as individuals; it is beyond identity. In the advent of an aesthetic experience everybody is equally, which is not to say equal. We are *equally*. And whatever you are is absolutely fantastic. The aesthetic experience is the space where identity and differentiation is not. At that moment, we are *equally*. You participate in the world in this way, somebody else in another way, but we are *equally*. In that moment we can begin to formulate new kinds of law. (Bozicnik, Zimmerman, and Spångberg 2016, original emphasis)

My roles at the outset of both these works, as a visitor to [*musical.(function Transform(){blau}*(euph.OR.i.[a](NGE)))*]; and a performer in *TRANSCENDING, for Peace*, blurred from one into the other, in opposite directions respectively. In [*musical*], my spectatorship transformed into a kind of conviviality, as I became "equally" with the others, and in *TRANSCENDING, for Peace*, I am a performer who becomes a subject each time differently and "equally" in a group ritual. In both works, the " 'spectacle' [gets] literally dispersed in the body of the public and in their subjective temporality" (Gheorghe 2017, 67). Performativity in these works operates with "singularities [that] escape representation, they can only be alluded to. ... This way, dance alienates itself from the urgency to be new and also from its subjective authorship" (65).

Like M.I's curatorial project, these works exist in broad frames that are more than their singular presentations or multiple activations. They manifest as ambient events, involving their past and future selves. They branch into other works and artists, times and spaces in "spirited affiliations", a term used by writer and curator Adrian Heathfield, who, also in the 20th BoS, premiered *ghost telephone* (2016), "a daily chain performance comprised of new interlinked works" (Heathfield 2016). Invited artists "channel[led] and transform[ed] the spirits of existing works in the gallery" by spending a week "attuning to its resonances and mutating its immaterial affects" and "generating new correspondences and reverberations," another kind of "unending performance work" (Heathfield 2016).

We are all the time in the presence of traces; past, future, invisible estuaries. Who and what is in between, outside, before, beyond what is presented? How does a format open up to

these processual elements, performing itself through an artwork? And so it seems appropriate to conclude with an opening from choreographer, performer, teacher, and editor Alice Chauchat's *Togethering, a group solo* (2015):

performer and audience share roles: assistant, companion, collaborator or host, as protagonists of the theatrical event. Considering our shared time/space both as a reality and as a projection space for other occasions of coming-together, it is an invitation to address those occasions as experiments that are each time re-formulated and that we invent together. (Chauchat 2015)

Notes

1. This is, of course, a reference to Spångberg's book *Spanbergianism* (2011).

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ALICE HEYWARD practices as a dancer, choreographer, writer, translator and editor, based between Melbourne and Berlin. Situating artistic practice in human experience, curiosities about memory and transmission, transformation and non-linear temporality, drive her working processes. Her works and collaborations are presented at Next Wave festival, Dancehouse (Keir Choreographic Award), Murray White Room, Uferstudios, Kunsthaus Kule, Sophiensaele and more. Her writing is published in the Dancehouse Diary, Viereinhalbsaetze, Indigo Dance Magazine and This Container. She regularly engages in collaborations by artists and groups including Xavier Le Roy and Scarlet Yu, Shelley Lasica, Alexandra Pirici, Grażyna Roguski, Roni Katz, Colette Sadler, Female Trouble, Alicia Frankovich, Hana Erdman, Lilach Livne, Geoffrey Watson, Mia Lawrence, Simone Forti, Maria Hasabi, Michael Poetschko, Becky Hilton and Laurel Jenkins (for Trisha Brown), among others.

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