

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

SuperGroup makes art.

SuperGroup uses the traditions of experimentation and collaboration to deepen, broaden, stretch, expand, explode and generally alter.

SuperGroup strives to spark audience interest in the art of performance for its own sake.

SuperGroup values disparate aesthetics, conflicting ideas, spontaneous creation, and meticulous crafting in order to make something skillful, something beautiful, something new.

HISTORY

SuperGroup is the dance-theater performance collaboration of Erin Search-Wells, Sam Johnson, Jeffrey Wells, and Byrd Shuler.

Founded in early 2008, SuperGroup has spent the last three years creating unique and challenging contemporary performance for fearless audience members throughout the Twin Cities. In that time SuperGroup has created three full length pieces (*GroupWork One*, *Shouldwewaitnoworwait* and *Oh, I Didn't See You There: The St. Firebell Story*), three dance film shorts, and several other pieces and structured improvisations including *Lexicon of Something* and *Spring Dance Unrated* performed at the Walker Art Center's 2008 and 2010 Choreographers' Evening and an hour-long structured improvisation as part of the *Yves Klein: With the Void, Full Powers* exhibition also at the Walker Art Center in January 2011.

The group's members share a long history that started at Minneapolis South High School nearly 16 years ago and continued through their college years in NYC. A particularly influential and formative time artistically for the members of SuperGroup was when they lived together in Brooklyn between 2003 and 2006. It was during these years that through working, creating, viewing and performing they were able to take their individual experiences and interests and build a common artistic vernacular steeped in and inspired by the NYC downtown performance world.

After returning to Minneapolis, in an effort to continue and formalize their commitment to being collaborative performing artists, Erin, Jeff, Sam and Byrd co-founded SuperGroup. Since Spring 2008, SuperGroup has been a part of the Springboard for the Arts Fiscal Sponsorship Program, providing them with administrative, development and legal support as they move toward obtaining their own non-profit tax status.

SuperGroup is in the process of creating a brand new full length work continuing to build on their technique of layering movement, text, and music in new and unexpected ways. The work, tentatively called *The Tent Has Been Pulled Down*, explores the seemingly endless world of the feminist blogosphere and contrasts its disembodied voices with a very real, very visceral movement vocabulary honed from improvising bodies in space. SuperGroup will be performing a 10-minute excerpt of this new work at the 9x22 Dance Lab in Minneapolis at the end of July and a 21-minute excerpt at the CATCH Performance Series in NYC in August 2011.



Photo: Sean Smuda

Lexicon of Something, Walker Art Center, 2008

PRESS QUOTES

“SuperGroup turns out to be aptly named: I've never seen such smooth collaboration, such happy group-brain, as from this quartet of native Minnesotans. [...] [T]he members of SuperGroup strike me as NewPeople: two men and two women steering clear of traditional gender roles, all skinny and limber as if they've been doing sun salutations while the rest of us eat bacon, seemingly trained in modern dance, acting, and voice, and comfortable doing all three at once.”

-Lightsey Darst, mnartists.org

“I've got a soft spot for artsy weirdos, and artsy weirdos these are. New avant garde performance troupe *SuperGroup* will premiere their brand-spankin' new dance/performance/art/theater/sculpture piece this weekend at the Bedlam Theatre to most likely baffled, but surely enraptured audiences.”

-Kate Iverson, Secretsofthecity.com

“Eight [sic] dancers in neon, hooded unitards embody [...] a slyly self-reflexive glossary of choreographic and performance strategies [...] with Laban-like incisiveness and deadpan humor.”

-Linda Shapiro, Dance Magazine

“the dancers move about the stage in irregular, often contrapuntal fashion, venturing a step here, a turn there, a point here, a bend there. They don't often look directly at one another, but they speak to and about one another in kaleidoscopic interpretations of multi-character texts, changing roles and voices.”

-Jay Gabler, Twin Cities Daily Planet

“This group of dancers and artists delivers a punch of an engaging evening. You will get caught up in the moment and be surprised. I felt I was seeing experimental, abstract dance theater at its finest!”

-Abby McGuire, Citypages.com, audience review

“SuperGroup [...] create[s] controlled chaos through a shifting interplay of movement, overlapping narratives, showy vocalizing, semi-rants, marimba-rattling and, most significantly, sometimes revealing references to the performance methods behind their madness.”

-Caroline Palmer, StarTribune

“that's SuperGroup: excessively smart, fundamentally absurd. Altogether, they come off as a strange mix of *enfant terrible* and good citizen.”

-Lightsey Darst, mnartists.org

LIST OF WORKS

PERFORMANCE

SuperGroup at École De Klein

École De Klein, Walker Art Center,

January 2011

First Free Saturday, Walker Art Center,

November 2010

In conjunction with the *Yves Klein: With the Void, Full Powers* exhibition at the Walker Art Center, SuperGroup performed durational structured improvisations in the galleries and public spaces, dressed in monochromatic bodysuits, in order to create a live, 3-dimensional experience of moving color for patrons; to connect body and movement to visual art. The score was created based on the techniques, ideas and works of Klein, as well as the design of the exhibition and the space itself.



Photo: Cameron Wittig



Photo: Sean Smuda

Spring Dance Unrated

Choreographers' Evening, Walker Art Center,
November 2010

Set to Bach's Violin Concerto No. 1 in A Minor, *Spring Dance Unrated* is a joyous romp employing a classical modern movement vocabulary placed beneath tunics of polar fleece. Throughout the piece, the costumes lift, stretch and ultimately rip away in a celebration of the nude human form.

Oh, I Didn't See You There: The St. Firebell Story

SuperGroup Studio, Northwind Lofts, Minneapolis, November 2010

Oh, I Didn't See You There... is SuperGroup's third evening length production and is concerned primarily with the forms of narrative and story-telling and how these forms are undermined, altered, and transformed when filtered through the body, the voice, and the minds of both the teller and the audience.

Yesand And No

Kinetic Kitchen, Patrick's Cabaret,
October 2010

Yesand and No is an exercise in control, rule setting and rule breaking. In real time, an omniscient disembodied voice gives performative directions to the members of SuperGroup, creating a world of consent, contempt and controlled chaos, as performers maneuver the confusion of following their own desires versus someone else's.



Photo: SuperGroup

boy, boy 2 and queer

Queertopia, A Cabaret Celebration of Queer Love, Bedlam Theater, June 2010 & 2011

boy, boy 2 and *queer* are three short cabaret performances that push the limits of what the queer body is as a performance object.

SuperGroup Improvs at Art-A-Whirl

Casket Arts Building, 2nd Floor Lobby, May 2010

SuperGroup's improv at Art-A-Whirl was an experiment in durational contemporary improvisation. The improvisation consisted of seven different combinations of parameters that could be dictated by any performer at any moment over a 2.5 hour time period. The piece explored among others, endurance, non-traditional performance space, nomadic audience participation, group impulse, and the relationship between object and performance art.

Shouldwetitleitnoworwait

Premiere: Minneapolis New Breed, Southern Theater, February 2010

Work in Progress: Skipping Stones, Brooklyn Arts Exchange, February 2010

Work in Progress: 9x22 Dance Lab, Bryant Lake Bowl, November 2009

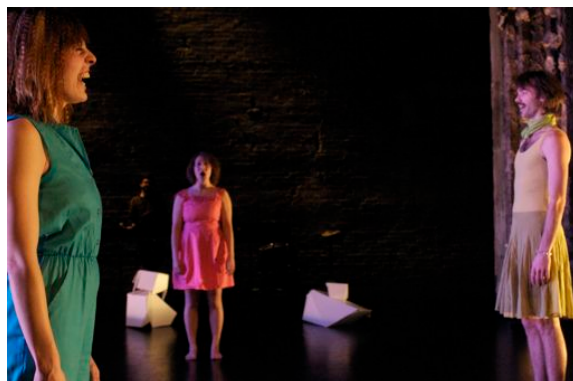


Photo: Sean Simuda

Shouldwetitleitnoworwait is an adventure in a divided process. For the creation we consciously avoided agreeing on a unifying theme, instead hoping to create a richer, more complex meaning through layers of experience. For us the finished piece is about what we want the world to be: a world of people striving to participate on many levels, a world of complex meaning, of individualized

style, of group cooperation, of fart jokes, of self reflection, of intelligent moving bodies, of anger, of beauty, and of redemption.

Lexicon of Something

Premiere: Choreographers' Evening, Walker Art Center, November 2008

9x22 Dance Lab, Bryant Lake Bowl, July 2008

Lexicon of Something was inspired by our growing awareness of performance elements often used in our work and the work of our contemporaries. We compiled a list of these elements, set the order in which they would occur, some specific choreography and a time limit, and allowed improvisation to take over from there.

GroupWork One

Premiere: Bedlam Theatre, July 2008

Work in Progress: Red Eye Works In Progress, Red Eye Theater, June 2008

GroupWork One is SuperGroup's first evening length performance. It is an exploration of construction, destruction, monument and art. It is a detailed investigating of the intricate language of everyday gesture and is an experiment in live sculpture creation that centers around, deconstructs, and reassembles the trappings of a typical dinner table scene.



Photo: SuperGroup

Sex Clowns

Bedlam Theatre, June 2008

Sex Clowns was a structured improvisation exploring abstract elements such as line, wave, re-ordered found text, and a moment of playing to the audience, which we called "sexy clowns." The piece was heavily interactive and created tension between giving an audience what they want and sticking with our plan.

VIDEO

SuperGroup Dances in the Face of the Shelf They Built Last Year and Also Builds Another Little Tiny Shelf

Dance Film Project 2010, Southern Theater, December 2010

Second shelf, 'same as the first, a little bit louder and a whole lot worse.'
Continuing to explore shelf building and rudimentary execution of advanced film editing techniques, SuperGroup harnesses their collective skills in contemporary performance, floating film, and carpentry to build that shelf again.

Video for Breezy Pines

Video for Chantal Pavaqueaux, artist in residence at Mabou Mines, 2010

This is an improvised movement video exploring chaos theory within synchronized structures, particularly the Lorenz Waterwheel.

SuperGroup Builds a Shelf

Dance Film Project 2009, Intermedia Arts, December 2009

In an effort to create a space to store books, collectibles, and other miscellanea SuperGroup builds a shelf. And films it.



Photo: SuperGroup

Oh, I Didn't See You There: The St. Firebell Story,
The SuperGroup Studio, 2010

BIOS

SuperGroup was created in 2008 by founding Artistic Directors Jeffrey Wells, Sam Johnson, Erin Search Wells and Byrd Shuler. As of January 2011, Byrd has taken an indefinite leave from her Artistic Director role, and is now interacting with SuperGroup in the limited role of Associate Performer.

Sam Johnson is a performance-based artist living in Minneapolis. He graduated from Skidmore College with a degree in dance performance, and moved to NYC where he studied intensively at the Trisha Brown Studio and performed with David Gordon's Pickup Performance Company in *Aristophanes in Birdonia* and *Dancing Henry V*. He has worked with a number of other artists, including Daniel Linehan, Mariah Maloney, Natalie Green, and as a friend of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company at City Center, NY. He has presented his own work at Spoke the Hub in Brooklyn, and as a part of the Minnesota Fringe Festival, where he premiered his piece *HowDo* at the Southern Theater. Recently he performed with Justin Jones in *Cold Spring* at EMPAC in Troy, NY, and in *Jig* at the Bryant Lake Bowl in December 2010.

Erin Search-Wells is a dancer, performing artist and comedian. While in New York, Erin was a recurring artist of the performance series *Catch*. She created and performed *Janet and Tina: Hard-up and Landlocked* with Abigail Browde, which premiered in at University Settlement (NYC) and won the Audience Encore Award in the 2006 Minneapolis Fringe Festival. She trained in comedy improvisation and sketch writing at the Upright Citizens Brigade where she founded the sketch comedy group Quiet Library. Additionally, Erin has worked with John Jesurun, appearing in *Bardo* at NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing, and *Chang in a Void Moon*, at LaMama E.T.C.. In Minneapolis, she appeared in *HowDo*, *Tres Bitches or I wanna go to Moscow*, *Dead City*, *The Love Party* and *Masha 3000*. Her play *Girlz: A Reckoning* was selected for Bedlam's 2009 Tenfest. Erin received her BFA and Studio Award from NYU Tisch School of the Arts- Experimental Theatre Wing.

Jeffrey Wells is a dance-maker, composer and director based in Minneapolis. He received his BFA in a combination of musical and experimental theater, and a minor in applied theater from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. In Minneapolis he has performed with Paige Collette, Chantal Pavageaux, and Bright Eye Productions. Jeffrey's musical training includes piano, guitar, trumpet, and euphonium as well as studying extended and improvisational voice technique with Richard Armstrong and Lisa Sokolov. He has composed for voice, piano, guitar, marimba and percussion and is currently working on the instrumental arrangements for the music of *The Home, By Josephine*, a contemporary theater piece by Brooklyn-based artist, Abigail Browde. Jeffrey also has a seven-year relationship with LA-based Cornerstone Theater Company, as both a performer and staff member during their summer residencies. He most recently served as the Associate Institute Director of their 2009 summer residency in Eureka, CA.

Byrd Shuler is an experimental artist who makes performance that looks like dance, theater, art installation - or all at once. Byrd holds a BFA in performance from New York University's Experimental Theater Wing, and is a graduate of Cornerstone Theater Company's Institute on community-based theater. Since 2004 she has created and performed original work with Margot Bassett and Bright Eye Productions. She has performed in works by Shawn McConneloug, Theatre de la Jeune Lune, Cornerstone Theater Company, Hijack (cast of thousands), Chantal Pavageaux, Sara Richardson, and Erin Search-Wells. A 2008 Naked Stages grant recipient, Byrd performed her first solo piece, *This Here Now*, in October of 2008.



Photo: Sean Smuda

Shouldwetitleitnoworwait, The Southern Theater, 2010