

Erinn Liebhard - Artist Statement
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My name is Erinn Liebhard, and the seemingly simple yet deeply complex practice of grooving my body has led me to my life's passion: dance. With groove-driven social dance ideas as inspiration and concert dance as my chosen artistic mode, living at this vibrant yet niche intersection has required I proactively produce the kind of dance work I wish to create, perform and encourage others to engage with. I'm proud of the 20+ year career I've built as a long-time, highly active and supportive member of the Twin Cities dance community whose built a national profile helping people connect to themselves, one another, history and the moment through the connective and reflective power of groove.

I've been fortunate to build a creative life around groove - what scholar Tiger C. Roholt describes as being "pulled into a musical 'notch,' guided onto a musical 'track,' buoyed by rhythm." Groove isn't just a fun byproduct of dancing to music, it's the result of deep connection to not only music, but to myself, other people and the moment. When I get into a good groove, in a crowd or on a stage, I fall into my body. I feel my heart pumping, sweat dripping and the curves of my mouth turning up. I feel buoyant, intimate connection to the earth, those I'm dancing with, and fleeting moments. Embodying metric rhythm - grooving - is a uniquely human capability. The work I create allows people to experience groove together, offering meaningful social connection that helps people reflect upon and cultivate their humanity.

I grew up dancing socially, jitterbugging and two-stepping at my dad's rock band's gigs South of the Twin Cities. I discovered young the exhilaration of thinking on my feet alongside others, with the groove of a good tune as our connection point. Interest in embodied musicality is what drew me to eventual study of concert dance styles like ballet and modern, including receipt of a BFA in Dance from the University of Minnesota and an MFA in Dance from the University of Colorado Boulder. I've continued to study concert dance forms and many styles with American social origins, including

clogging, tap styles, swing and jazz styles, funkstyles and house, all of which owe a great deal to their African diasporic ancestors. Studying Congolese, Brazilian, Ghanaian, Guinean, Haitian and Cuban forms has allowed me to better understand how they serve as roots for the jazz and American social dance ideas I hold dear. I've also moved to train and perform with artists and companies like Decidedly Jazz Danceworks (Calgary, Canada) and Jazz Rhythm Jazz Project (Chicago), alongside performing with local folks like Eclectic Edge Ensemble, Karla Grotting (Flying Foot Forum), Jolene Konkel (Concerto Dance), Christine Maginnis and Zoe Sealy (Minnesota Jazz Dance Company) and Contempo Physical Dance.

These pursuits, as well as my work as an educator and scholar, have imbued me with a deep understanding of the root movement ideas that inspire me as a choreographer. I have a curiosity and passion for exploring how joyful, rhythmic commonalities among social and concert dance ideas can be employed artistically in staged contexts. While I'm taken with many styles, I've found a creative home in jazz, and have honed an approach that honors the roots of the form while helping innovate it forward. Creating concert dance works inspired by jazz allows me to explore connections between root and branch forms related to American social dance styles while reveling in elements I love about my modern and contemporary training like expansive travel, floorwork, weight sharing and shifts in facing. My years of artistic and scholarly research have led me to a unique choreographic framework that prioritizes groove, interaction and improvisation, three elements present across approaches to jazz.

I'm inspired by how these ideas bring people alive within and outside of themselves, expressing freedom alongside inner cool while thinking on their feet. I love investigating how groove can manifest in infinite ways from tune to tune, style to style and body to body, and fuel improvised interactions between these things. By choreographing with embodied groove at the center, I'm creating space for danced understanding and appreciation of differences and similarities. Despite these qualities and a deep connection to social change and exchange over time, the dance forms I

work within are often commercialized and disassociated from the African diasporic roots that fuel these meaningful attributes, often causing them to be passed over by artistic institutions as lacking in depth. I have had to learn how to frame up my work with writing that supports its depth to counteract these barriers to understanding and have my work taken seriously.

Despite these challenges, I have persevered in making space in the current concert dance world for the things I love and find impactful. An anchor of my 20+ year career in the Twin Cities has been founding and choreographing, performing and curating guest artists for my dance company Rhythmically Speaking, which is in the midst of its 18th season. I've also had many local and national guest choreography commissions, and have built a national profile for myself as a presenter, educator and scholar with a unique and accessible approach to jazz. As an extroverted lover of people, community building has always been central to my artistic life. When people join my company, they stay, because they value our work together, I see them as equal players in artistic creation, and I work my tail off to compensate them as fairly as I can in an environment in which funding for the arts is ever shrinking. My ongoing advocacy for the local dance community is reflected in my long-time attendance at Minnesota Citizens for the Arts' 'Arts Advocacy Day,' in my service as a member of the Cowles Council for its last four years, and recent efforts to help organize the community in the wake of the Cowles closing in 2024.

I'm proud that my work in dance connects people to themselves, one another, history and the moment through the connective and reflective power of groove. I've had to build the skill required of not only a successful choreographer, but also Artistic and Executive Director, producer, performer, educator, and the parent of two small children - wearing all of those hats simultaneously - for my work to thrive. I am confident that within all the challenge *and* fulfillment, my ongoing creative curiosities and my passionate desire to serve others through movement will continue to drive my life's work in dance.