

BOXBLUR

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Now Playing! SF Dance Film Festival Proves Dance's Expressive Potential

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Swan (Michaela DePrince) and Franz (Daniel Camargo) in 'Coppelia.' (Jeff Tudor, Steven De Beul and Ben Tesseu)

Film festival trailers are bite-size enticements—morsels of marketing—that often boast big ambitions: Express the spirit of the program along



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with its breadth, and convey the mission of the organization as well as its exemplary curatorial taste.

The trailer for the [San Francisco Dance Film Festival](#) (Oct. 15–24 in theaters and online) hits all those marks and delivers a dose of joy to boot. Give your day a boost and check it out:

<https://youtu.be/6inXwvf4Qow>

I generally consider filmed dance (and theater, for that matter) a poor substitute for the high-wire energy of live performance, but I took a couple takeaways from the trailer. The pandemic year propelled throngs of dancers outdoors, to create and commit performances to film. Second, their need to connect—to communicate with an audience—was as powerful as their drive to make art.

A festival preview involves more than reviewing the trailer, even if it is particularly instructive in this case. To be sure, the long-form pieces in the program were conceived, shot and well into postproduction before the coronavirus breached anyone's consciousness. Blending animation and ballet to delicious effect, the family-friendly fairy tale [Coppelia](#) receives its U.S. theatrical premiere on opening night (Oct. 16 at Fort Mason's Cowell Theatre, with Sierra Leone-born ballerina and activist Michaela DePrince on hand).



Amit Patel performs in Fremont, California. (Elie M. Khadra)

Closer to home, the festival's shorts programs offer more inspiration per minute than seems possible. "[Dance Heals: BOXBLUR](#)" serves up eight shorts and a live performance by Amit Patel at Catharine Clark Gallery on Oct. 17. "[Dancing Queens](#)" (Oct. 23 at Brava Theatre) is a kaleidoscope of out-and-proud works featuring Rashaad Newsome's jaw-dropping, show-stopping *Black Magic*, an extravagant marriage of free dance, free jazz, rap and spoken word (and a gospel-tinged vocal quartet!).

The thrillingly diverse (in every way) "[Bay Area Shorts](#)" program (Oct. 24 at Brava) delivers revelation after revelation that dance can be the most personal, direct medium for expressing identity. Mariella Morales' *Forces of Nature*, produced and directed by Alafia Dance Ensemble's artistic director and choreographer, is a mesmerizing series of outdoor dances celebrating the Afro-Brazilian religious and spiritual tradition of orixás. Shot on an enclosed glass porch strewn with



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hourglasses and surrounded by snowy vistas—evoking pandemic isolation and the yearning to be seen—Katerina Wong’s austerely beautiful *Slipping Sand* employs the gracefulness of movement to push against time.

Rorschach, a sharp-edged, riveting collaboration between dancer Benjamin Defaria and filmmaker Valentina Reneff-Olson, unfolds in vignettes in a freight elevator shaft and other confined spaces accompanied by a panoply of off-screen voices. “I don’t believe you can plan,” the last speaker says. “Life happens to you.” And there you have the pandemic in two sentences.

The San Francisco Dance Film Festival runs Oct. 15–24, with films streaming on Marquee TV alongside select in-person screenings. [Details here.](#)

<https://www.kqed.org/arts/13904750/review-dear-san-francisco-club-fugazi>