

## Artistic Biography 2024

**Larissa Velez-Jackson (LVJ)** is a choreographer, interdisciplinary artist, performer and teacher who uses improvisation as a main tool for research and creation, focusing on personhood and the dancing/sound-making body. LVJ employs humor to grant audiences universal access to contemporary art's critical discourse. Of their first, solo, critically-acclaimed show at Danspace Project (2010), the New York Times said, "Ms. Velez-Jackson demonstrates her own formidable presence as she bursts into the space... A choreographer who is not afraid of being (or showing) ugly onstage, she disarms her audiences with humor...." In 2011, LVJ launched a song-and-dance collaboration with their husband, Jon Velez-Jackson, called Yackez, "The World's Most Loveable Musical Duo." Yackez presented a two-act world premiere at New York Live Arts in March 2017, entitled "Give It To You Stage." LVJ is also the Artistic Director of their project-based company, LVJ Performance Co.



Velez-Jackson's works have been curated internationally in Mexico City, Mexico and Madrid, Spain at Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo. Their works have been performed widely in New York City, including The Bushwick Starr, The Chocolate Factory, Roulette, Museum of Art and Design, Danspace Project, New Museum, American Realness Festival at Abrons Arts Center, and Martin E Segal Theater. In May 2014, LVJ performed an exciting mobile outdoor work, S.P.E.D. THE BX, with the support of Bronx non-profit, Papatian and Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education. S.P.E.D. THE BX was a durational site-specific work that culminated for an audience of 70 children and BRONXNET cable television. Later in 2014, LVJ premiered "Star Crap Method" at Chocolate Factory Theater. The piece was the culmination of three years of studio and stage research in LVJ's improvisational performance methodology, The Star Crap Method, (two years of which was funded by a

Movement Research Artist Residency) for a cast of four people. The piece also featured lighting designer Kathy Kaufmann's improvised lighting design for each performance. Talya Epstein, a member of the cast, was nominated for a 2015 New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" award for their performance in this work.

Velez-Jackson was a Movement Research Artist-in-Residence (2012-2013), a Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide artist-in-residence with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (2013), an El Museo Del Barrio Artist in Residence (2014-2015), a Live Feed artist-in-residence at New York Live Arts (2015-2016). In 2012 LVJ attended the danceWEB Scholarship Program of Impulstanz Festival in Vienna, Austria, with the support of a Jerome Foundation Travel and Study Grant.

Velez-Jackson is a passionate teacher of mind/body wellness and fitness classes, formerly teaching at the 92 Street Y and West Side YMCA in New York City for fifteen years, specializing in the older adult population. Larissa's private teaching includes Pilates, functional and corrective exercise and Gentle Rasa Yoga. LVJ's choreographic works, "Give It To You Stage" with Yackez and her "Zapatografia/Shoegrrophy" at Bushwick Starr incorporated a cast of senior dance-exercisers. The latter featured members from the Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council (RBSCC). With the support of Henry Street Settlement (HSS) and an AirSpace residency at Abrons arts Center, LVJ restaged "Zapatografia/Shoegrrophy" in December 2018 at Abrons Arts Center with seniors from HSS and the original cast from RBSCC.

The year 2016, Velez-Jackson's tenth year of making experimental dance, fulfilled the famous Martha Graham adage "it takes ten years to make a dancer," or in this case a choreographer. In 2016, LVJ was awarded the prestigious Foundation for Contemporary Art's "Grant to Artists" award, The Award (mentoring initiative 2016-2017), a Gibney Dance Center DIP residency, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Process Space residency (for Yackez), Mount Tremper Arts Watershed residency (for Yackez), and was nominated for a New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Award for Outstanding Emerging Choreographer. After that LVJ was a choreographic Artist in Residence at the historic Harkness Dance Center at 92 Street Y from 2017-18. They were a Movement Research Artist in Residence from 2018-2020 and prepared for a new commission with the Chocolate Factory Theater in 2021-2022, researching self and community care and healing through their newly named Star Pû Method (f.k.a Star Crap Method). This new work for LVJ Performance Co. was also supported by a Shonberg Fellowship at The Yard in Martha's Vineyard, as well as the Caroline Hearst Choreographers-in-Residence program at Princeton University.

LVJ is a Puerto Rican-Italian-American originally from Newark, New Jersey, and an ongoing cancer survivor of multiple myeloma, now identifying as a disabled artist. They are committed to the healing and transformative potential of integrating art and body/mind practice. LVJ is honored to have been awarded a Dance/NYC's Disability. Dance. Artistry Residency in 2022 and a Choreographic Fellowship with Axis Dance Co. in Berkeley, California (2024). The theme of

healing, of self and community, continues in their newest project with Jon Velez-Jackson (Yackez) that began its research at the Pillow Lab at the historic Jacob's Pillow in Becket, Massachusetts in Spring of 2023 and continued its research at Chapman Steamer Arts in Newburgh, NY in December of 2023 with funding from the New York State Danceforce Choreographic Initiative, under the peer-resource guidance of artist and organizer, David Brick.