



PHOTO BY MEERAH POWELL

Audience and dancers collaborate continuously to create #instaballet performances BY CORINNE BOYER

In 2013, ballet dancers Suzanne Haag and Antonio Anacan wanted an alternative to off-season ballet work — an opportunity to continue dancing throughout the summer. Most ballet seasons typically run from fall to spring, Haag says, when dancers try to pick up work in off-season performances or teach classes.

“We thought, ‘Well, why don’t we create our own thing so we can continue performing and providing some work for dancers?’” Haag recalls.

So, during a First Friday ArtWalk in 2013, Anacan and Haag tried a pop-up ballet performance by incorporating audience participation, and #instaballets have been continuing ever since. Anacan says the idea transformed from performing a mock rehearsal to incorporating ideas from the audience and ultimately using all of the suggestions from people watching. They had no idea what to expect, he says.

“The first time we just opened up our doors, and we didn’t know who was coming,” Haag explains.

“It was a free event,” Anacan adds, “and people started showing up and our first piece was very beautiful. It was a very unique thing, and people really saw it because you’re part of it — you’re part of the process. You’re not presenting a product, we’re creating it and the product is the creation and the process.”

On the First Friday this September, four dancers gathered at Capitello tasting room. Anacan was the liaison between the audience and the dancers — he took ideas from a few children, and instantly the ballerinas danced around transforming into cats — crawling across the space.

Accompanied by a live jazz trio, the dancers built a performance with both simple and complex moves, remaining open to a variety of suggestions from the all-

ages crowd gathered to watch.

Sarah Stockwell dances with #instaballet and says she loves the audience investment.

“Part of the thing that we want to show with #instaballet from the beginning is the process of creating a dance,” Stockwell says. “You know you always just see the final product and with #instaballet, you’re seeing how ideas become movements and how dancers have to review the movement in order, so that we can do it right.”

#instaballet has transformed into its own nonprofit so that people can donate and dancers can be paid. The organization is also working within other parts of the nonprofit community and currently partnering with Bridgeway House, a special education school, to help facilitate communication with dance performances.

For further information, including a schedule of events, visit instaballet.org.



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