

# The Washington Post

## How dancers cope when they can't dance: They improvise

By: Sarah L. Kaufman

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In this uncertain time, dancers have a useful perspective: Gently loosen those joints and muscles as much as you can, firm your self-discipline, calm your mind. Dancer wisdom teaches us that life is live theater, forever an improv performance, and we can feel our way through it by establishing a routine, caring for our whole selves and also turning outward, to care for those around us.

Yet performing careers are brief, and no dancer can afford to lose time — or money. The recently interrupted tours, canceled premieres, locked studios and social distancing requirements have hit the financially fragile, socially enmeshed dance world hard. When your life revolves around lifting, leaping, catching, jumping and otherwise spending time (often literally joined at the hip) with your dance partners, how do you deal with solitary confinement?

**Courtney Celeste Spears, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company member**

**Spears had sublet her New York apartment while she was on a national tour with Ailey; when much of the tour was canceled, she moved in with her parents in Tampa. The company hopes to resume touring in early May, so Spears needs to keep herself in top performance shape.**

**"The thing about dancers is, we are so creative and so versatile, you throw us a curve, and we will improvise. I'm trying to keep myself on some kind of regimen. I'm up early every morning, since I'm used to going to company class, so I'm giving myself a ballet barre workout in my garage.**

**"With a ramen spoon, a tennis ball and a yoga mat, I can spend two hours in a workout that is strengthening, aligning and releasing. I do this Monday, Wednesday and Friday: I give myself an entire floor barre workout, lying on my back and side and trying to align myself the way I would when I stand. Then I use the tennis ball to release my psoas [core muscles] and hip flexors, underneath my shoulder and up by my traps, and I roll out my calves. With the bowl of the spoon, I dig into the spaces more deeply, in between my toes and metatarsals and shoulder girdle. Then I do planks. Tuesday and Thursday, I do heavy cardio. I bike, walk and do jumping jacks.**



**"We're not going to jump back onstage like nothing ever happened, but we want to narrow that gap, so it doesn't feel foreign. Then you just need a couple of good rehearsals to get back into it. And I feel like when we come back together, in some weird, alien sense, we'll be stronger."**

**"Right now is a really scary and unsure time; it's easy to slip into an unhealthy mental state. Mr. Ailey was so big on dance being a vessel to spread love. It's an extremely important principle of our company. So we made [this Instagram video](#) of company members doing parts of "Revelations" in our homes and balconies and with our dogs. It's continuing this thread of love, life and positivity. And sending prayers to those who are not feeling well."**

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*Elisa Clark, dancer and teacher*

Clark, a former member of the Mark Morris Dance Group and **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater**, lives in the Bronx. She has been performing with Monica Bill Barnes & Company and teaching at the University of the Arts and Fordham University.

"I was supposed to set a piece at Juilliard in April and May, but now performances are canceled, so I lost that job. I have a teaching engagement at Princeton in April, but what if they say, 'We don't need you anymore?' My next performances with Monica Bill Barnes are in June, but we don't know if that's going to happen.

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