

Umami Playground Dance Inc.

NYC

Play, Make Mistakes, Explore

Contemporary | House | Floor Work | Breaking | Popping | Hip Hop

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Umami Playground Dance Inc., founded in 2022, is a collective of movers who **Play**, **Make Mistakes**, and **Explore** as their core values. With expertise in House, Popping, Tutting, Breaking, HipHop, Floorwork, and Contemporary, they are one of the rare companies blending street and contemporary dance. Their team includes contemporary dancer graduates from NYU, Alvin Alley to national breaking dance champions, uniquely positioning them to create fusion works that bridge these dance worlds with imagination and experience.

Humor and comedy are central to their storytelling, often drawing on the everyday experiences of ordinary people and reframing them on stage through their distinctive approach to dance. They believe that telling one's own stories is both unique and powerful, and use their core value—**Play**—to bring those stories to life.

They innovate by fusing cultural and traditional dance into theatrical works. Their 2023 piece, *Playground*, incorporated *gugak*, a Korean traditional music format, to explore play. Their 2024 production, *Elements of Life*, reimagined East Asian elemental symbols of the weekdays. They have also fused Korean traditional dance, Afro-Peruvian tap, and Filipino folk dance with street and contemporary styles.

TOURING REPERTORY

Toured in: **Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art; Zimmerli Art Museum; SEIU Annual Convention; Texas Amphibian Stage SparkFest Finale; Peridance Presents; Gibney Dance; Queensboro Dance Festival (2022–2025); NYC Pride Parade; Judson Movement Research; JCAL; Elements in Boston, Queens Theatre and more.**

Our repertory is highly adaptable and can be customized for different program lengths, cast sizes, and performance spaces. We have presented work in both indoor and outdoor settings, in venues ranging from intimate spaces of 30 seats to large-scale theaters and public venues serving audiences of up to 3,000. Our work engages diverse audiences, from children to all ages.

In addition to our existing repertory, we can tailor excerpts or develop new works in response to specific contexts, settings, and audiences. As a street dance–based company, we bring a strong foundation in freestyle and improvisation, allowing us to respond quickly and creatively to a wide range of performance needs.

Elements of Life - 90 mins - 8 dancers

The work draws inspiration from the East Asian naming system for the days of the week, which is based on the “Seven Luminaries” (七曜, *qī yào*)—the Sun, the Moon, and the five planets visible to the naked eye. The set is divided into seven sections: Moon (月), Fire (火), Water (水), Wood (木), Metal/Gold (金), Earth (土), and Sun (日): Each section explores and depicts the typical experiences associated with its corresponding day, including how it feels, the activities connected to it, and how people relate to these elemental representations. The work also reflects the cyclical nature of life as it moves through the rhythm of the weekdays.

Clothing - 25 mins (will expand to 60 mins in 2026) - 12 dancers

Initially inspired by the concept of a tube man and the intriguing textures and movements created by oversized clothing, we asked, “Why not make a set fully focused on wearing different garments and creating unique movements and illusions?” The work is structured into sections defined by different clothing textures and forms, including oversized clothing (XXXXL), tight clothing (XXXXS), pajamas, traditional cultural garments, and various accessories, exploring the visual and physical illusions created through each.

NYC - 30 mins - 10 dancers

A kinetic portrait of New York City—its subways, streets, noise, rhythms, and restless energy. Dancers move through the city’s daily realities: crowded commutes, constant sound, the pressure of expensive rent, and the collision of cultures and languages. Shifting between grit and beauty, exhaustion and resilience, the work captures the chaos, pulse, and lived intensity that shape how New Yorkers survive, adapt, and keep moving.

Unbecoming - 15 mins - 6 dancers

Directed by Bhutanese artist Puspa Ghalley, *Unbecoming* is not an act of loss, but a return. You have cast aside the false and are now free to expand—to merge with the universe, to become the very space between stars. You are not the form, not the name, not the identity. You are the vastness. You are the stillness. You are the breath of all that is.

Playground - 25 mins - 7 dancers

Playground is a direct reflection of our company's mission, which centers on the value of play. As people grow older, we tend to limit ourselves as we accumulate knowledge. Similarly, as artists train and mature, we often move in certain ways—not necessarily because we choose to, but because we have been trained to. In addition, with the prevalence of social media, dancers may focus more on how they look and on creating work that pleases viewers. This piece aims to break free from those limitations, encouraging dancers to release judgment and simply play in the dance playground, like children. We strive to maintain the same mindset we had when we first encountered dance—the pure joy of moving with music and rhythm, and the endless possibilities of movement.

Running - 3 mins - 3 dancers

Drawing inspiration from the simple act of running, the piece explores its various forms—from crawling and chasing to racing and beyond—through dynamic floorwork and elements of House dance.

Shogeki - 4 mins - 10 dancers

Shogeki is inspired by the anime *Attack on Titan*. The piece explores human nature in its simultaneous ugliness and beauty, using layered metaphors to reflect both human history and events that continue to unfold today.

Mirror - Site specific Interactive Work - 4 dancers

Mirror is an interactive work consisting of two parts. It premiered at Chashama's annual fundraiser and invited audiences to explore their imagination and reflect on their behavior.

TEACHING & OTHER SERVICES

Dedicated to the community, we have hosted over 60 workshops, produced two free showcases, and presented more than 30 free outdoor performances across New York City. Multiple company members regularly teach at NYC studios such as PJM, KBL, Modega, and AKF. We can provide classes in:

- Umami Repertory
- Breaking
- House
- Popping, Tutting and Animation
- Waacking
- Contemporary and Contemporary Floorwork
- Contemporary Partnering Techniques
- Modern
- Body Conditioning
- Party Dance for non-dancer / dancer
- Kids class

Past workshop includes:

- Modega, Joyce New York Center for Creativity & Dance, Queensboro Dance Festival, Evolute Academia, Green Space (NYC, NY)
- Northeastern University, Boston Dance Studios (Boston, MA)
- Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH)
- The Ohio State University (Columbus, OH)
- University of Florida (Gainesville, FL)
- Battle of the year Chile (Arica - Chile)
- Pura Calle (Lima - Perú)
- Hip hop al Parque (Bogotá - Colombia)
- Urban hop Graff (Lausana - Switzerland)
- Vortex Jam (Rennes - France)
- All Elementz Studio (Tianjin, China)
- Dream Vol. 5 Dance Festival (Hokkaido, Japan)
- Taipei American School (Taipei, Taiwan)

In addition to workshops, we also have experience providing lectures, informal showings, and dance competition judging.

ENSEMBLE

Director / Performer: Guangmin Shen's work bridges street dance and contemporary forms. He began dancing in 2009 and started his professional career in 2010 as a choreographer in Chengdu, China. Since relocating to New York City in 2016, he has trained extensively in street and contemporary practices, with a primary focus on House dance, mentored by pioneers **Sekou Heru, Tony McGregor, and James "Cricket" Colter**. His movement practice fuses House, popping, breaking, contemporary floorwork, martial arts (Taekwondo black belt and Capoeira), and Korean-Chinese traditional dance. From 2017 to 2021, he served as choreographer for **The Neighbors Dance Company**. He founded Umami Playground Dance Company in 2022 and remains an active freestyle battler, placing second twice in major NYC dance battles.

Artistic Director / Performer: Yurie Ono, from Japan, began studying ballet at age four and later transitioned into street dance while attending Obihiro University. She has since developed versatility across Street Jazz, Hip-Hop, Waacking, House, Locking, and Breaking. She won the **GATSBY Dance Competition** in Hokkaido and later joined the renowned **Chibi Unity** dance company. In 2018, she moved to New York City, where she deepened her street dance foundation while exploring contemporary dance. From 2018 to 2021, she served as co-director of **A Rhythm Company**, leading the team to first place at SAYAW. As a solo artist, she placed in the top five at the **Fabulous Waacking Battle** in 2023. She is also an active member of **Feathers Dance Company, Disagreeable Creatures, and Free Focus Dance**, and regularly teaches at PJM Dance NYC, AKF Dance Studio, and Evolute Academia.

Artistic Consultant / Performer: Kevin Chen (Popping, Tutting and Animation), Roni Flores "RoFlow" (Breaking), Bea Martin (House and Hip Hop), Da Hyun Kim (Contemporary), Wan Rong Tseng (House, Hustle and Lite Feet), Puspa Ghalley (Waacking and Dancehall), Shannon Healey (Modern and Hustle), Rachel Hsu (Contemporary)

Performer: Jeanne Oliver, China Braekman, Luyan Li, Hatsune Ishihara, Maggie Chang, Kai Nakayama

CONTACT & PRODUCING INFORMATION

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