

Audio Transcript: Penumbra: Full Moon Party

January 28, 2021

Solana Chehtman:

Good evening everyone and thank you for joining us for Penumbra, a music, movement, poetry, and blessing party to celebrate this full moon in Leo in the midst of Aquarius system, basically, according to my personal guru Chani Nicholas, a moon that illuminates our area of group projects and collaborations, and a time that favors creative energy and pursuits so both energies that couldn't be more perfect for tonight's gathering. My name is Solana Chehtman. I am the director of civic programs at The Shed.

Attendee:

I don't have sound yet. Okay.

Solana Chehtman:

And I am delighted to be here with you all tonight, sharing space and getting to enjoy together all the amazing offerings that the artists have prepared.

Attendee:

Every one of my computers is different. This is crazy.

Solana Chehtman:

I am a Latina woman with short, salt-and-pepper hair that I've tied in what in Spanish we'd call a half-bun. I have no clue how we call it in English, but I'll find out for next time. I'm wearing a bright red dress matching with bright red lipsticks and I'm sitting in front of one of Yo-Yo Lin's virtual backgrounds that she created for this piece and for tonight called "*Stars New Moon*." This, as well as other backgrounds, are part of a Zoom care package that I hope you've all received and had the opportunity to go over. There, apart of all these backgrounds, you will find information on the structure of tonight's event as well as some key Zoom how-tos that may be important to guide your participation during the next hour.

I want to start the evening asking how everyone's doing [crosstalk] and going through a few of the forms of access that we will have tonight and asking everyone again for the very beginning to keep yourselves muted. And there's going to be moments for you to unmute yourself and of course be able to participate. In the bottom of your window there's a button that says Live Transcript where you can find real-time captions provided by Noah Collin so you can click that and then click show subtitles if you need those.

We also have American Sign Language interpretation provided by Brandon Kazen-Maddox who you can pin to have on view at all times. To pin them, simply find through a quick search of the participants. Their name starts with ASL and click on the pin icon on the right top corner of Brandon's picture. Brandon knew this was going to be a full moon party so I think they brought a special outfit for us. And in general our wonderful digital staging team composed by our colleagues Justin and Emma at The Shed have prepared a soft suggestion viewing for flow. So you can simply put your viewing on speaker mode and they'll be using the spotlight feature to show you any main artistic happening and Brandon at all times. But by all means, feel free to navigate at your leisure, find and pin your friends and use gallery mode to see the wonderful, amazing group of humans gathered here tonight.

And finally, we also have audio descriptions provided by Michelle Mantione, particularly for visuals by Yo-Yo Lin later, but throughout the whole event. To access those, please turn on the French channel on the language interpretation button below. So if you go to language interpretation, there's going to be a couple of options. Click on French channel, and you'll be able to listen to Michelle's descriptions.

Michelle Mantione/Audio Description:

Hi everyone, just giving a quick note to let you know I'm here.

Solana Chehtman:

To be fully able to enjoy this event so please at any point also feel free to use the Q&A button or the chat and our wonderful colleague Gretchen will be there also from The Shed to chat with you, answer any questions or comments and try to accommodate any requests. Seeing so many hits and messages already popping up. This is so exciting. I want to thank very specially all of our access workers for joining us tonight, as well as our artists and our disability arts consultants for guiding us in the path to becoming a truly inclusive and equitable 21st-century arts organization. And we all are still learning though so please, please, all feedback and comments always welcome. Also, just so you know, we will be recording this event just for archival purposes. So if you don't want to appear, feel free to turn your camera off or change your name or whatever you need to do.

Penumbra, as you may have read, is taking place in conjunction with the Brothers Sick, Ezra and Noah Benus, Yo-Yo Lin, and Danilo Machado's collaborative piece "*Phases and the In-Betweens*," which debuted on The Shed's website on January 13 as part of our "Up Close" digital commissioning series. It's a project that disrupts, in the best way possible, the language and the feel of our website with a nonhierarchical, creative, thoughtful, and very personal take on collective care in the midst of Covid-19 and beyond. It includes video, poetry, movement in the way of illustrated gifs and lots of in-betweens. And it's definitely very worth exploring, so if you haven't yet, we invite you to come to our website and do so. And the commission has been transforming and evolving with each phase of the moon. Today it actually hit its third iteration, turning to a silverish gray as if illuminated by the full moon and will continue to do so through February 11, so please don't miss it.

This is the 12th commission as part of "Up Close," a program that was born in April 2019 as a digital platform for both artists' creativity and audiences' catharsis in the midst of Covid-19 and has become a space for mourning, joy, questioning, and reflection that we hope will continue through 2021 and beyond. And we have many more projects coming up this year. I'd like to thank a number of our supporters who make "Up Close" and tonight's Penumbra possible. M&T Bank, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs have all provided generous support as well as our own Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Commissioning Fund and the Shed Commissioners. And I also want to thank the Howard Gilman Foundation for providing the Zoom platform that we will be using on this evening's conversation. And last but not most important of all, I want to introduce our artists tonight, although my feeling is that most of them don't need introduction.

We have Ezra and Noah Benus a.k.a. Brothers Sick, or a sibling artistic collaboration on disability justice, illness, and care, as well as educators, curators, and activists. Ezra is currently a SHIFT artist-in-residence at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts project space and Noah is completing his master's in

visual arts education at City College. Yo-Yo Lin is a Taiwanese American interdisciplinary media artist who explores the possibility of self-knowledge using multimedia and live performance to create what she calls meditative “memo-riscapes.” She was a 2019 Access artist-in-residence at Eyebeam and is also part of our new Shed “Open Call” cohort, which she will be joining for performance in summer 2022. And we are so, so excited. Yo-Yo is currently in Taiwan and it’s the morning for her. And unfortunately, something has happened with her internet two seconds before we started so she might not be joining us as of now. She might appear later, hopefully. We’re crossing fingers and we will try to share some of her work though, but you’ll hear more about that from the artists themselves.

Then we have Danilo Machado, a poet, curator, and critic born in Medellín, Colombia, and currently living in Brooklyn. Danilo is a 2020-2021 Poetry Project Emerge-Surface-Be fellow, the co-founder and co-creator of the chapbook/broadside fundraiser “already felt: poems in revolt and bounty,” and is currently working as curatorial assistant at Socrates Sculpture Park. Yay, Danny Lloyd. Exactly Lauren. So nice to see you by the way. And the four of them have invited for tonight Jimena Lucero, to be part of the event. Jimena is a poet, actor, and a sister, and her work is rooted in trans liberation, disability justice, and future building. Jimena was a 2019-2020 Emerge-Surface-Be fellow at the Poetry Project, as well, and her writing appears in the “Recluse,” Nightboat’s “Echo,” “EOAGH,” Colorbloq.org, and more. Finally, she has recently collaborated in a short film after her poem titled “Silver Femme.” But, because we only have an hour and we cannot wait to get started, I want to pass it to Ezra and Noah to start with the blessing. And enjoy everyone and we’ll see you later.

Ezra Benus:

Thanks Solana. I’m Ezra and I am a white Ashkenazi Jewish queer person with black curly hair, some facial hair, dark eyebrows. I’m wearing some Beats by Dre headphones. I’m wearing a white turtleneck and a really fun glimmery see-through shirt on top of it, that’s pink and blue. I am sitting on my comfy chaise lounge and in back of me is a white wall with some big windows and some plants sitting on the sill. Noah?

Noah Benus:

Hi everyone. My name is Noah Benus. I look similar to Ezra. I am a white Ashkenazi male with dark hair and facial hair and round silver glasses. I’m wearing a white turtleneck against a white wall. Back to you, Ezra.

Ezra Benus:

Thanks Noah. Thank you all for being here. Moments of celebration are rare during these pandemic times and it is not taken for granted. So thank you again for choosing to make time and create space with us.

Noah Benus:

The full moon offers us monthly moments to bask in and reflect on its abundant shine. The Hebrew word for full moon is “keseh,” which comes from the root word “kos,” meaning cup. The full moon is commonly understood by ancient rabbinic commentators as a time brimming with light and abundance, as if the proverbial cup is filled to the brim. So take a breath, smile, check out the beautiful abundance, the fullness we have here in the Zoom room.

Ezra Benus:

Now, I want to ground us in ritual. This is in memory of those who have died due to the raging pandemic, to systemic oppression, rationing of care, inhumane practices of incarceration, medical apartheid, and by the constant maligning by capitalist, white supremacist, ableist notions of worth and value. You are all valued.

Noah Benus:

In honor of those lost, we now light these Yahrzeit candles. Yahrzeit is Yiddish for the anniversary of someone's passing date according to the Hebrew calendar, which is on a lunar cycle. If you have access to a candle, please join us in this ritual.

Audio Description:

Noah reaches from some candles slightly out of frame. The flame comes into frame, one hand with a match, the other hand with the candle. He blows out the match.

Noah Benus:

Now we are lighting the candle in memory of the dead. 420,000 and counting. We will recite an abridged version of the Mourner's Kaddish, a sanctifying prayer, in Aramaic and Hebrew and then in English, a prayer that cannot be said alone.

Ezra Benus:

[reciting the Kaddish]

Noah Benus:

May there be abundant peace from heaven and life for us. Who creates peace in celestial heights may create peace for us. Now watch the candle flicker in all its light and abundance. Notice how the flame dances and glitches, warm and lively, flickering past, present and future.

Audio Description:

These candles are in glass holders.

Ezra Benus:

There would be a sounding of the Shofar, a ram's horn, on the new and full moon. Sounds shaking and erupting us, connecting our bodies to the spirits, to the world and to each other, blurring any distinctions between the terrestrial and celestial bodies, our collaborative artwork glitches this already blurred sense of time and space between the personal and the public spheres and insists on the connected, cyclical, interdependent, collaborative body. Tonight, we are offering a chance for eruption and fullness of light and abundance with some poetry by Jimena Lucero and tunes from DJ Queer Shoulders, accompanied by the visuals of the artwork that we created and from Yo-Yo Lin's background animation. DJ Queer Shoulders, now to you.

[music plays]

Yo-Yo Lin:

Hey, this is Yo-Yo. How's everyone doing? Can I get a woo?

Attendees:

Woo.

Yo-Yo Lin:

As we phase into the full moon together, I invite you to join me in a movement inspired by the moon. We're going to keep the music going and if you feel like joining in on this movement, feel free to join in and invite anyone else to join in on the witnessing and describing movement as they notice it in the chats. So, let's take a moment to find your place for moving. This can be standing, sitting, or lying down. Find a comfortable place, a generous place, a place that invites your full sense of being. This can be in front of the computer or off away from the computer. Just stay within range of my voice as I guide us through a movement score. So, I will pause now, so folks can get situated.

All right. Let's gather ourselves for movement. Feel where your body touches the earth. In what ways does your body support you? Find a body part that is supporting you right now. Gently locate it through your touch or through gently swaying that body part. Once you have located it, notice how it supports you. If it feels safe to do so, you may close your eyes. Feel the ways in which you are supported.

Just as the moon causes the tide to ebb and flow, so do we. So, not only do we ask in what ways does our body support us but also in what ways can we support this body? Notice the areas on your body supporting you that need extra love in this moment. Gently tap these areas. Give them a squeeze if you can. In what ways can you say thank you to them? Explore the ways you can give support.

Next, notice the areas that feel light. Feel the weight shift through your body, where you find support, where you give yourself support. Revel in the weight, the substance, the abundance of your body in this moment. Let gravity be your dance partner.

[music plays]

Next, notice the areas that feel light. Allow these areas to float, to drift weightlessly as if clouds on a luminous night, sky, catching moonbeams, playing with the stars. What does weightlessness mean in this body? Just as the moon hangs overhead, moving across the night sky, in what ways can we find ourselves dancing with gravity, defying it simultaneously as being held by it? Let us practice shifting between lightness and heaviness.

As the moon fills up on this full moon, we ask, what are the ways we can come into fullness? Bring what you've learned about lightness and heaviness, and move with intention, allowing your movements to become full.

Perhaps coming into fullness means taking up more space. Perhaps this means feeling something you tucked away. Perhaps this means moving with more intensity. What does coming into fullness mean to you? Let's take this moment to find our fullness.

Once we have come into our fullness, we approach letting go of this, as well, knowing that the only certainty is change. Our shifting natures have taught us so since the beginning of time. As we move forward, let us remember what our heaviness has taught us, what our lightness has given us, and what our fullness feels like. Most importantly, let us remember how we phase together with the moon, with the tides, with the celestial bodies above, and the celestial beings with us today.

[music plays]

I invite you to witness one and other and thank you so much for moving and phasing with the moon with me.

[music plays]

Thank you so much for, and dancing, and being beautiful. I'm going to reintroduce Solana next, to do a little second access check, to just make sure if you have joined us that you know what's going on and know how to get access. So, Solana.

Solana Chehtman:

Thank you, Yo-Yo. I was saying on the chat, thank you so much. I'm so excited you were able to join us from the phone and guide us through that movement. And thank you everyone for joining us. This is such a pleasure to be a part of and to witness. So we are incredibly excited.

As Yo-Yo mentioned, I want to make sure that everyone who got here a little later can know all their access points. So, in the bottom of your window, there's a button that says, live transcript, where you can find real time captions provided by Noah Collin. So you can click that, and then click show subtitles, if you need those.

We also have American Sign Language interpretation provided by the, now I may say, amazing, wonderful, outstanding Brendan, Case, and Maddox. Brendan, you're bringing so much life to this, so thank you. You can pin Brendan to have on view at all times. To pin them, simply find them through a quick search of the participants. Their name starts with ASL, and click on the pin icon on the right top corner of Brendan's picture.

And, in general, if you haven't changed it from the beginning, if you have speaker view, our beautiful team of Justin and Emma have prepared a soft suggestion for view info. So they are spotlighting the main speakers and artists at any time.

And, finally, we also have audio descriptions by Michelle Montione. Michelle is also doing poetry with her words. So, thank you so much, Michelle. I suggest that you connect with that at any point, just to listen in. It's beautiful to access those. Please turn on the French channel on the language interpretation button below.

If you have any questions, comments, requests on the chat, our beautiful colleague Gretchen is answering everyone's questions with the name of The Shed. So please feel free to do that as well. And something that I forgot to mention before, but I can mention now is, also please feel free to opt out of the chat. That can be a little bit too much if you are using a screen reader.

So, and then, thank you so much, and please let's get the artist to return our friend Noah, I think, just because this is so beautiful. Thank you for joining us.

Noah Benus:

Hi. I'm just really thankful, again, for all of you to be here and let's hear some more music. Yeah.

[music plays]

Ezra Benus:

Thank you so much, Danilo. That was DJ Queer Shoulders with some live visuals from Yo-Yo Lin. This is Ezra speaking again. I am really excited and really happy and proud to introduce a friend and a poet who we all deeply, deeply admire, whose poetry will help transport us into the next phase of our lives of the night. I want to introduce Jimena Lucero by reading her bio very quickly, and then she'll read the poem.

Jimena Lucero is a poet, actor, and sister. She was a 2019-2020 Emergent-Surface-Be fellow at the poetry project. Her writing appears in the "Recluse," Nightboat's "Echo," "E O A G H," Colorbloq.org, and more. She recently collaborated in a short film, after her poem titled Silver Femme. Jimena's work is rooted in trans liberation, disability, justice, and future building. Welcome Jimena.

Jimena Lucero:

Thank you as Ezra. I'm so happy and excited to be here with all of you tonight. And I just want to say, Danilo, Ezra, Yo-Yo, Noah, this art piece that you all created is so beautiful. And I'm just thankful to be celebrating with all of you tonight. I'm going to read one poem. Oh, wait. I want to do a description. I am a Brown trans woman. I'm wearing a silver blouse with a black tank top. I have pink eye shadow with some silver. So "Silver Femme" is a poem I wrote when I was in college and I was figuring out who I was. And so I created this alter ego that kind of it embodies no gender and gender and someone who theorizes about the moon. So this is "Silver Femme."

We were at your house drinking a 40 ounce. Had been a while since I drank alcohol, but your presence was worth the celebration. You looked as beautiful as you do tall and pensive with your light brown hair. I pictured my brown crooked fingers, dancing and swirls around your head, digging a hole, reaching the skull. You made me feel divine, like the glazed ceramic angels my mother hangs in her home's hallway, to keep bad spirits away. The room was warm and red. I laid on your bed attempting to feel sexy. You handed me your drink after your mouth was bonded to it for a minute or so. Gazing across, I gulped the alcohol gulping you. I was glad, you treated me neither like a boy, like a girl. You never used a pronoun when talking about me. I was a middle, a fume, a possibility.

That night, you asked me about my gender. What it meant to me and how I pictured it. You said you wanted to learn more, be a darling confidant. A light in my chest pulsated like the massive moon behind your curtains. I hypothesized my gender to be far removed from our physical circumstances. The moon is trans. She shines like a silver femme, I said, flipping through her phases. I imagined my body to belong where it wasn't harmed. You squint your eyes and I curled into myself. My astronomical concerns puzzled you, but you took me as I was, a shape-shifting soul that has a home in altering latitudes. Our friendship was so reliant on futurity then. When I'd see you again, my body still mine, would be all of the unsaid things that night, a blip in time.

Thank you.

Solana Chehtman:

That was so beautiful, Jimena, thank you.

Jimena Lucero:

Gracias.

Solana Chehtman:

And we are running just a tad bit late. I want to ask our DJ Queer Shoulders if we want to have one more song before we say goodbye, and then we'll say goodbye. Does that sound like a plan? Just to go energize? Yeah.

[music plays]

Thank you everyone for joining us tonight. This has been the most amazing Zoom I've had in a very long time because it's so moving. The moon is indeed a sliver femme, a trans moon. Thank you so much to all of our artists tonight. You transported us, as I said, like you grounded us, you allowed us to fly. Thank you. I couldn't be happier to have worked with you all. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Ezra, Noah, Yo-Yo, Danilo, Jimena, for imbuing us in moonlight this evening. It has been such a pleasure. Thank you all for joining us. It has been so wonderful to see you move, to hear your chat... to read your chats too. It's been wonderful to share space.

I want to thank again our supporters, without whom we couldn't be able to do our work. So thank you M&T Bank, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Commissioning Fund, and the Shed Commissioners and The Howard Gilman Foundation for providing this platform for tonight.

I want to thank again all of our access workers tonight. You are all artists yourselves and we couldn't be happier to have had you with us. And please to everyone visit "Phases and the In-Betweens" on our website, check out the rest of the "Up Close" commissions. This has been a wonderful space for us all to share space, literally digitally when we couldn't get out of our homes. And we want this to continue and we want the exchange to continue, the creativity to continue. So please keep checking that out and check TheShed.org for other programs. We are also open with a wonderful exhibition by Howardena Pindell. So come join us. We'll see you very soon. Thank you again.

Attendee:

Thank you.

Solana:

Yes, unmute everyone, unmute.

Attendees:

Thank you. [crosstalk] Thank you.

Attendee:

Thank you, Brandon, and thank you, Solana. Thank you, Yo-Yo and Ezra.

Solana Chehtman:

And thank you, Justin and Emma and Gretchen and Elizabeth and Amanda and everyone at the Shed team that makes everything possible, because, thank you.

Ezra Benus:

And Solana. Thank you, Solana!

Attendee:

Night-night.