

## 40 Years Passing By In (A) “HEARTBEAT”

Trained as an architect and a jazz musician (drummer, percussionist), I have always been interested in combining these two disciplines. Sometimes I try to make architecture more like music, as in my large interactive light/sound installations in public buildings (Harmonic Convergence — Miami International Airport (01); REACH: New York (02) — MTA 34th St. subway platform). Other times, I try to make music more like architecture, more physical, more visual (03; 04).

Since our performance of HeartBeat:LMU on 3.1.25, it has been over 40 years since I began this exploration. Below, I’ve written some of the highlights. I’ve also invited some of the remarkable performers I’ve worked with over the years to contribute their reflections.

The impetus began in 1979, when my father died of a heart attack. He was a loving dad, a great social dancer, and had a sharp wit. He used to tell me, “Chances are that problem-solving solution, that light at the end of the tunnel? It’s an onrushing locomotive.”

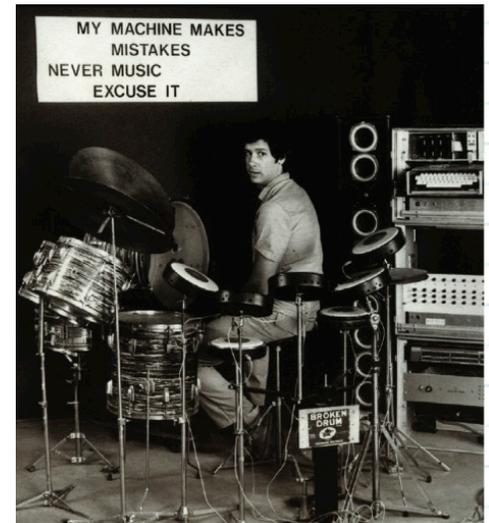
Around 1981, while I wasn’t consciously creating a piece in his memory, the “light” was there in my mind. At the time, I was a Research Artist at M.I.T.’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies. I had created a number of touring sound installations, including Soundstair; Rome, 1981 — a temporary installation on the Spanish Steps in Rome (05).



01. Harmonic Convergence – Miami International Airport



02. REACH: New York – MTA 34th St. subway platform



03. Percussion-Discussion



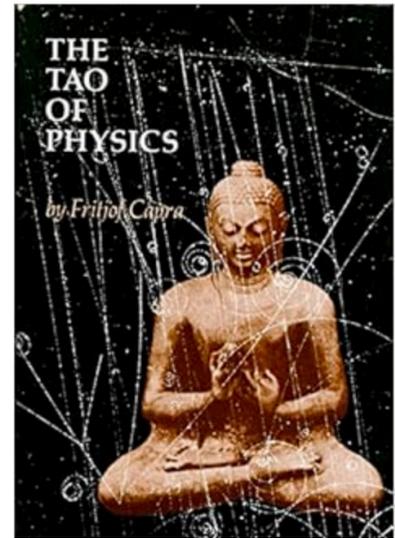
05. Soundstair; Rome, 1981



04. Sonic Shadow, Boston Ballet, 2010

In 1981, back in Cambridge, MA, I started playing my drums daily in my studio, both for relaxation and deep thinking. It dawned on me that everyone has a “drum” inside their body. Around the same time, I was reading Fritjof Capra’s book *The Tao of Physics*, a deeply illuminating exploration between Eastern philosophy and modern physics (06). In the book, Capra writes about Shiva, the god of dance and destruction:

*In classical Indian culture, dance is a demanding physical discipline. Dance prepares the mind for spiritual leaps: the dancer enters a trance, the dancer and the dance become one, reenacting the union of the individual soul with the transcendent tdivine.*



06. Tao of Physics

As if that wasn’t enough to spark inspiration, I then read:

*In Shiva’s upper right hand, he holds a small drum, known as a damaru, with which he beats out the rhythm of his dance. In his upper left hand, he holds a small flame, signifying the powers of both destruction and creation. (07)*

There were the drums! To me, this was about the “drum of time”, the idea that everything on the physical plane is moving, vibrating, and therefore has its own “drum.” In a transcendent state, using a metaphorical flame, there is no drum, no time, no physical plane; one has risen.

With MIT as my resource, I set out to find engineers who could help me build a telemetry device to reveal the heartbeat, the “hidden music” inside our bodies.



07. Shiva Sculpture

Once I had a working prototype of the machine, I had to find the “right” dancer. I had always conceived the piece as a solo dancer accompanied by musicians, and I had worked with dancers in Boston and New York on other projects. But at the time, none of them struck me as the right performer.

Around that time, I ran into a childhood friend in New York, Jed Wheeler. It turned out he was now composer Philip Glass’s manager and deeply connected to the New York “downtown” scene. I told him about my heartbeat concept, not thinking he might have a solution; we were just two old friends catching up. Below are his reflections on what happened next... (08)



08. 5-year-olds

**JED WHEELER** (09) Producer – For nearly five decades, Jedediah Wheeler has been a champion of dance, music, theater, opera, performance, and circus artists who were often considered too avant-garde for the performing arts mainstream. Known as a producer of multidisciplinary works for world-class venues such as BAM’s Next Wave Festival, his eye for “the new” helped to liberate New York’s downtown performance scene.



09. Jed Wheeler

## THE BEAT GOES ON

*A notion that becomes an idea that becomes a performance — that’s the stuff of the American avant-garde. Within each one of us is a rhythm machine.*

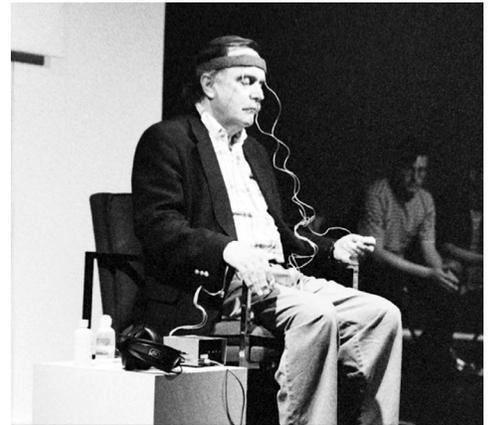
*At the heart (excuse me) of a really good idea must be a fearless imagination. Maybe it was Christopher Janney’s early fascination with John Cage that set him loose from conventional wisdom. Or maybe that bravery is rooted in a visual jazz improvisation sensibility. For a new idea to hold on, it needs to embrace layers of meaning without being self-conscious. Naiveté is at the heart of true inspiration.*

*Heartbeat is that “are you kidding me?” idea that remains a present-day marvel.*

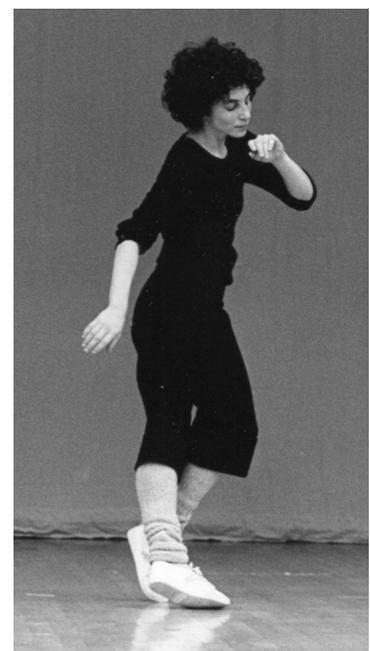
*You’ve got to have heart! When Chris contacted me about Heartbeat, he asked if I knew of a dancer who combined physical dynamism with performance elegance. Sticking electrocardiogram nodes on a dancer’s torso and processing a heartbeat in real time through a computer had a natural right to be part of the burgeoning electronic music canon. But Chris’s inspiration needed a practitioner.*

*Chris had heard I was working with Philip Glass and had toured the groundbreaking Dance by Glass, Lucinda Childs, and Sol Lewitt. But it was my experience with the electronic compositions of Alvin Lucier that gave me the right context for Heartbeat (10).*

*In a heartbeat, I recommended the dancer/choreographer Sara Rudner (11). Known as an inventive artist of her own making, Sara was socked in with the postmoderns,*



10. Alvin Lucier



11. Sara Rudner

*Trisha Brown and David Gordon, but more relevantly, she was also the signature muse of the whiplash choreographer Twyla Tharp. Stamina, speed, and physical prowess came effortlessly to her (12).*

*Plus, Sara is of a huge heart!*

*What pride I take in having introduced Sara and Chris. Two warm hearts with devilish minds that made a performance work for all time, answering my benchmark question: would you believe?*

Sara came up to my MIT studio a few times and stayed for a few days. We'd work for a few hours, then go swimming in one of the MIT pools, eat lunch, and then back in the studio.

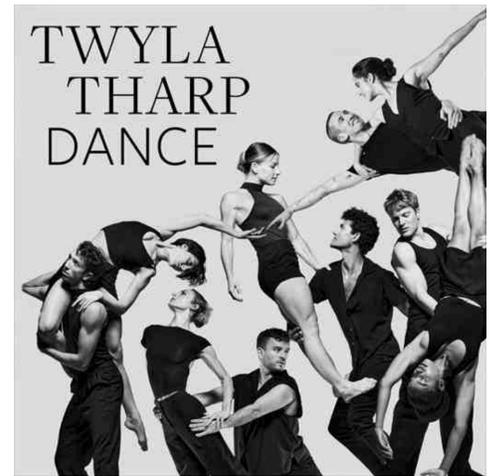
I recall the first time I put the heartbeat monitor on her. She stood still, closed her eyes, and took a few minutes to absorb what she was experiencing. Then she started to dance. (13) It seemed to me that she had one arm moving in 4/4, her hips in 3/4, and a knee in 2/4. She was this polyrhythmic machine working out over the steadily pounding sound of her amplified beating heart. After about 5 minutes, I said, "Wow, that's really great." She stopped, opened her eyes, and said, "Look, I'm just warming up." No more words from me for the rest of the afternoon.

In her own words....

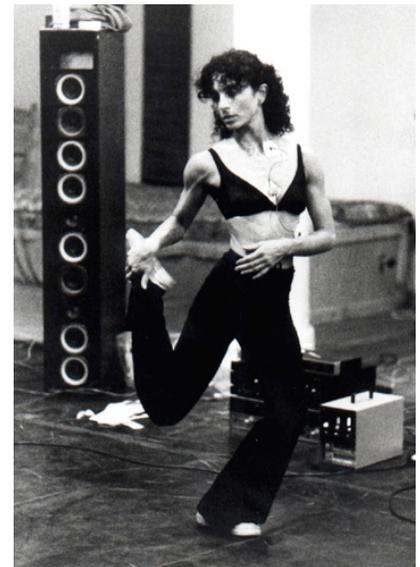
**SARA RUDNER (14)** *Dancer / Choreographer / Teacher. BA, Barnard College; MFA, Bennington College. Director of Dance at Sarah Lawrence College. A key participant in the development and performance of Twyla Tharp's modern dance repertory. Choreographer of a series of contemporary dance marathons and founder of the Sara Rudner Performance Ensemble. Recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, multiple NEA and New York State Council on the Arts grants, and the Dance Magazine Award. Collaborator with Wendy Rogers, Dana Reitz, Jennifer Tipton, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and Christopher Janney.*

## HEARTBEAT MEMORIES

*I had the great professional, and personal, fortune to meet Christopher Janney at a turning point in my life, courtesy of Jed Wheeler, my then-manager at Performing Artservices. Christopher proposed two projects to me: one that required spatial accuracy to create sound, and the other an*



12. Twyla Tharp Dance



13. S. Rudner with "HeartBeat" in Studio



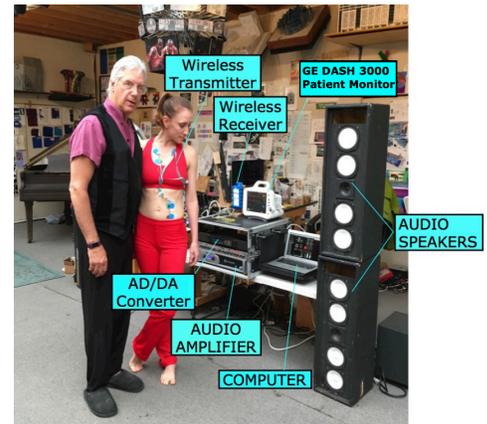
14. Sara Rudner

*improvisational, rhythmic conversation with the beat of my heart, or rather, the electrical impulse in my heart. My intuitive preference for “HeartBeat” defined the direction my dancing would take. It was 1983.*

*The first time I encountered the apparatus and technology was in his studio at MIT, in Cambridge, Mass. (15) Luckily, Christopher was wearing it when I first entered the space, and I could see he was still alive even though the sound had dropped out. If that had happened while I was wearing it, I might’ve doubted my own existence. Once I was hooked up, and while Christopher was adjusting whatever he had to adjust, I danced to my heart’s content with no aesthetic restriction or purpose. It was heaven.*

*At the time, I was still working with Twyla Tharp (16) She was creating the particularly detailed and fiendishly challenging dance “Fait Accompli”, which would become my final participation and contribution to her work. “HeartBeat” was the all-important segue into the world of solo, polyrhythmic response to sound, music, and words in an improvisational mode that became the wellspring of my dancing life. I count every experience I’ve had with HeartBeat as a treasure.*

Sara and I performed the piece on and off until 1990. Then, we both moved on to other projects. Around 1997, Sara called and said Mikhail Baryshnikov was interested in the piece, and was I interested. I replied, “How about tomorrow?” We three met in a studio at Lincoln Center. I first put the telemetry device on Sara. She danced for a few minutes so he could see and hear what it really looked and sounded like. I then put it on him. He danced for about 5 minutes, stopped, and said, “We cannot show this to Greg Hines. He will steal it.” I have many Misha stories, but below is one of his most poignant reflections on the piece...



15. “HeartBeat” Technology



16. T. Tharp Dance

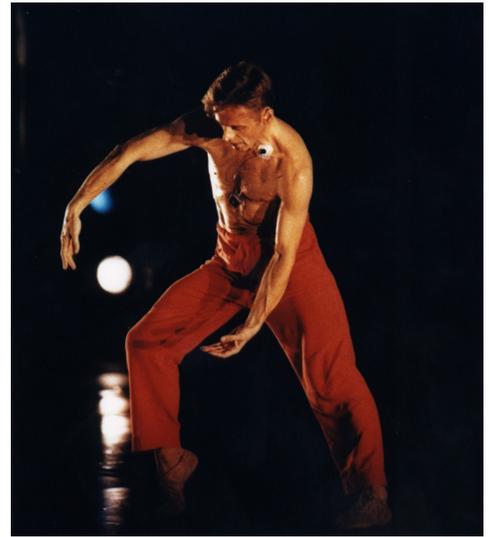


17. Mikhail Baryshnikov

**MIKHAIL NIKOLAYEVICH BARYSHNIKOV (17)** (Russian, born January 27, 1948) is a Latvian and American dancer, choreographer, and actor. He was the preeminent male classical ballet dancer of the 1970s and 1980s. He subsequently became a noted dance director. From 1990 to 2002, Baryshnikov was artistic director of the White Oak Dance Project. In 2005, he launched the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York.

*“It’s sort of a duet, or duel, with your mind and your body. It’s a very self-indulgent kind of moment, a moment of vanity. At the same time, there are deep thoughts about your mortality. It’s kind of amazing.” (18)*

The one musician I have worked with the most on this and many other music projects is Stan Strickland. Stan has been a part of this exploration as both a singer and sax/flute player. He has performed it with me as a solo dancer while playing the soprano sax. (19) When my son, Freddy, was christened at 6 months old in an ancient stone church, I put the heartbeat instrument on him and Stan played a most beautiful flute piece for all the angels to hear. Without a doubt, as I have been known to say, Stan is my brother from another mother.



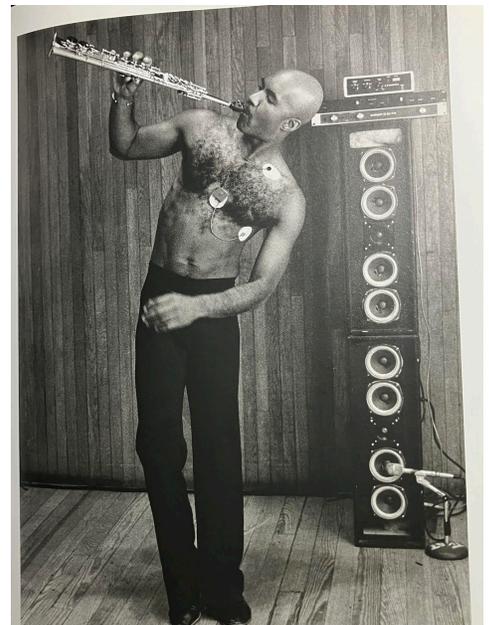
18. M. Baryshnikov dancing “HeartBeat”

**STAN STRICKLAND (20)** (M.A., Lesley University – Expressive Arts Therapy) is a singer, saxophonist, flutist, and actor, having performed extensively throughout the United States, Europe, New Zealand, and the former Soviet Union. Collaborators include the Boston Pops, the Village People, Aretha Franklin, Yusef Lateef, Pharoah Sanders, among others. He is an associate professor of voice at Berklee College of Music and executive co-director of Express Yourself, a multicultural arts agency that serves mentally ill youth through the Department of Mental Health.

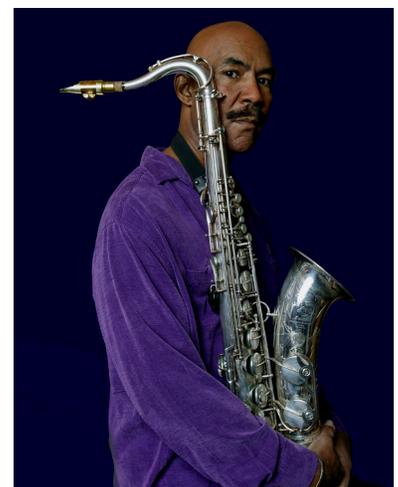
*Christopher Janney is a visionary and a maestro of artistic manifestation. In other words, he makes things happen. Our collaboration spans some thirty odd years and includes many of the highlights of my performance career. I’ve had the joy and honor of performing “Heartbeat” both as a saxophonist, dancer to my own heartbeat, and as a singer accompanying other performers.*

*A few highlight performances include: Jordan Hall, Boston, with beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti; Lincoln Center; The Kennedy Center; Disney Institute, FL; and Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. It’s been a blast! And we’re still at it!!*

In December of 2023, at 73 years old, I had had enough of the New England winters. My wife, Terrell Lamb, and I decided to move from Boston, MA to Los Angeles, CA where one of our children, Freddy, lived.



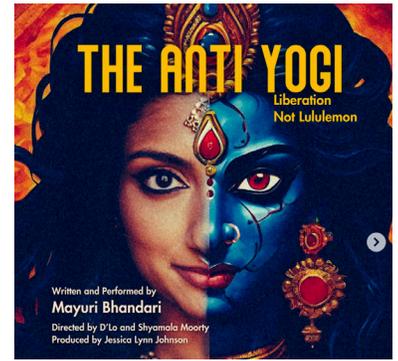
19. Stan Strickland “HeartBeat”



20. Stan Strickland

In the summer of 2024, I began to work on a new version of “HeartBeat.” I had always loved the Indian tabla and had studied it for a few years back in Boston with Berklee Professor Jerry Leake.

I inquired through a few Los Angeles musician friends about Indian players and met Robin Sukhadia. He subsequently introduced me to the dancer Mayuri Bhandari. I watched her videos online; she clearly had the “chops” to perform a 20-minute solo. But, needless to say, it takes a certain mindset to perform the structured improvisation of HeartBeat. As a graduate and now lecturer in the Yoga Studies Program at Loyola Marymount University, I knew she had the right mix; she could both “walk the walk and talk the talk.” (21) Below are her reflections on the piece. (22)



21. M. Bhandari Production  
“The Anti-Yogi”

**MAYURI BHANDARI** is a multi-hyphenate artist from Las Vegas known for her work in acting, dancing, figure skating, and filmmaking. A graduate of Loyola Marymount University’s Yogic Studies Program, she is using her art to fuse spirituality and life experiences. Mayuri made history as the first South Asian to showcase figure skating on Indian National Television and is a national figure skating champion. Beyond her artistic pursuits, Mayuri is an advocate for women’s empower

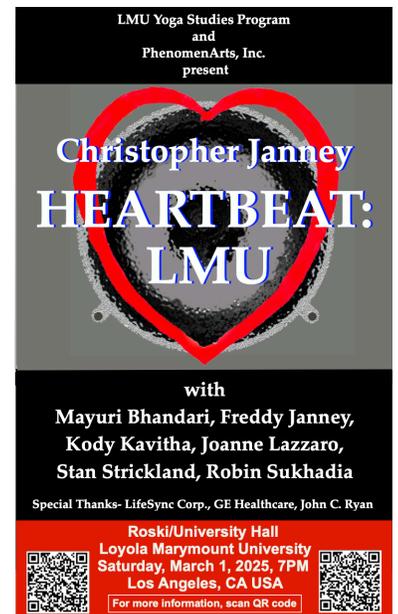


22. Mayuri Bhandari

### Reflections on a Heartbeat

“Rhythm.” Coming from the Sanskrit word *Hṛdayam* [हृदयम्] or heart. Heartbeat. It also reminds me of the Sanskrit word *Rta* [ऋत], which signifies natural order, the cosmos, or universal truth.” – Notes / M.B.

Reflecting on my experience as the dancer in Christopher Janney’s Heartbeat:LMU project, (23) I found the process both humbling and transformative. The central concept was simple, yet profound: dance to my own heartbeat, played aloud in real time, and explore movement in sync with and against it. The heartbeat, a constant rhythm, would guide my movement while also presenting challenges of timing, control, and awareness. This performance forced me to be fully present, to feel my heartbeat not as an abstract concept, but as a real-time pulse, driving the body. It was a **PARADOX**: the more I tried to control the movement, the more difficult it became to follow the



23. “HeartBeat:LMU”

*heartbeat's unpredictable pace.*

*The heart's job is to replenish oxygen to my muscles, but it first has to use up my body's reservoir. As a result, when I would start to move rapidly, the heartbeat wouldn't speed up right away. As well, after I had been moving rapidly for over 2 minutes and then stopped suddenly, the heartbeat would still be pumping at a fast pace, taking some time to replenish my body and reservoir with the necessary oxygen. (24)*

*As a result, the heart rate didn't always follow my changing rate of movement. This condition often forced me to adjust my movements, especially when I wanted to synchronize with the pulse. This pulse felt like it was both mine and, at times, NOT mine—creating a unique "dance" between my intentions and my heartbeat each time.*

### **NOTES / M. Bhandari journal**

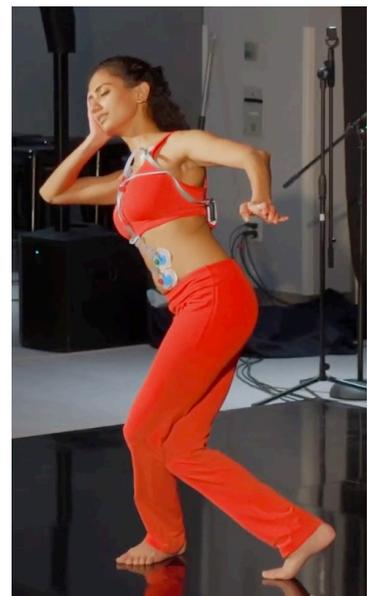
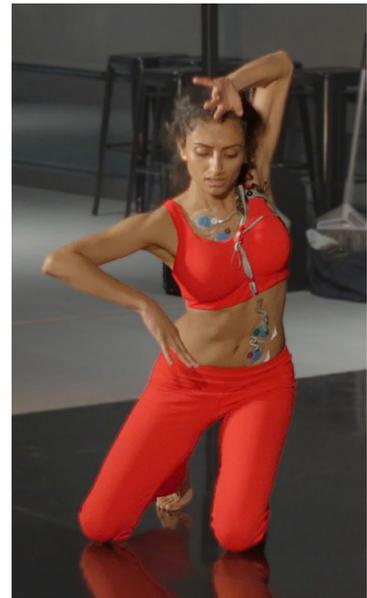
*"Being with the sound of my heartbeat, even just standing there listening to it, witnessing it, was enough. Quite profound. One can understand the concept, but it is much more difficult to embody, to experience the concept."*

*What struck me most was the vulnerability involved. With each rehearsal, I shed the need to be "performative" or "pretty" and instead focused on being truthful in the moment. This allowed me to confront my insecurities and explore my emotions in a raw and genuine way. The acting aspect of the project was crucial. As an actress, I was excited to tap into my emotional depth to truly connect with the movement expression. The resulting dance was not about aesthetics, but about the authenticity of the emotion conveyed through each gesture.*

*Ultimately, the project was not just a physical challenge but a spiritual one. It forced me to examine my relationship with my body, my heartbeat, and my own vulnerability as a performer. In this way, the process was deeply healing, and the opportunity to dance to my own heartbeat was both a gift and a revelation.*

### **NOTES / M. Bhandari journal**

*"At the very end of the piece, I walk to the heartbeat monitor to turn it off, to 'end' the audible sound of my heartbeat. During that walk, it was almost as if I was reflecting on my life and knowing that my death would come. And those last few seconds suddenly became most precious. How many people get to know their end is coming?"*



24. M. Bhandari "HeartBeat" performance

*It made me listen to my own heartbeat—the sanctity of it, the preciousness of it, the humanness of its existence. And then silence.”*

In conclusion, even after forty years working on one concept, one artwork, I have always thought of “HeartBeat” as having both dancers and musicians in the work (25). Like John Coltrane’s relationship to the saxophone or Joshua Bell’s to the violin, this “heartbeat” technology has been my “instrument.” I have found that performers listening to their heartbeat put them in a unique place; a unique environment that brings out expressions unlike any other.

25. HeartBeat Score, Section 3

I recall the first time I was able to get this instrument to elicit its unique sound. It was a most powerful and humbling moment. I had the thought that I actually didn’t “create” this sonic environment; it had created me. Like floating down a river, I knew the best thing I could do was not to impose my will on the work, but to just let it go and see where the river would take me. Forty years out, that river is still flowing.



26. “Drum of Time” Sculpture- ©1982, PhenomenArts, Inc.

**“In one hand, Shiva holds a drum.” I understood this to mean that all forms have rhythm — they are vibrating, even if only at the molecular level.**

**“In the other hand, Shiva holds the flame.” Fire signifies a means of transformation, the ability to burn away the old, allowing the new to form.**

**I took one of my old snare drums and burned it. Cross-breeding between music and visual art, I added a paintbrush and a drumbrush in a painter’s brush can. Then, I created a “coffin/instrument case” for the piece in dark blue velvet. I would take the piece with me, presenting it when I lectured. It was most helpful to focus my intentions. This “Drum of Time” was not only my new musical instrument, but my new “instrument about my music.”**