

# Janis Brenner

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Take Root at Green Space

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By Cecly Placenti, Six Degrees Dance

Janis Brenner: Concept, Choreography, Text, Direction and Performance

Musical Score: Jerome Begin

Creative Consultant: Claire Porter

On-Stage Assistant: Mary Lynn Gonsorcik



Photo by David Rauch

Take Root, a monthly dance series presented at Green Space studio, offers the opportunity for both emerging and seasoned dance makers to expand their body of work. April's

featured artists include Janis Brenner, Paul Ocampo and Evelyn Wang, artists that each weave narrative with movement in compelling ways.

From the opening notes of Cypress Hill's "Insane in the Membrane," Janis Brenner's solo, *She Remembers her Amnesia*, promises an adventure. Through spoken word, dance, music, comedy and visual art, Brenner enthrallingly embodies various mental states from disoriented and fragile to joyful and empowered. Similar to OcampoWang Dance, Brenner's work feels like a journey which brings audiences into her personal experience. Brenner strums a cardboard guitar as she sings about a time in 2017 when she experienced prolonged amnesia while speaking on a panel of artists. As she recounts waking up from her disorientation, she playfully mimics a Talking Heads lyric, "How did I get here?"

No stranger to solo work, Brenner's long standing career as a dancer, choreographer and vocalist is apparent. A master storyteller and exceptional singer, Brenner carries us with her through feelings of confusion, terror, exhaustion, and finally acceptance. With wit and humor she navigates her way through swirling questions and ambiguous doctor-speak. In a clear strong voice she sings a 1960's style folk song about EEG's and MRI's, the tempo growing faster and more frantic as she struggles to recall detail. Hand gestures morph into larger movement phrases performed to a disco beat. A brilliant aria about all the concussions and head injuries she has suffered throughout her life underscores the severity of these incidents. Although a heavy subject, Brenner injects lightness into her experience. "What is a normal brain anyway?" she asks. In a feeble voice, she sings and talks herself through visible costume changes providing contrast to the powerful singing and dancing she executes on stage. Brenner's artful transitions between scenes reinforce her disorientation and provide insight into her vulnerability.

*She Remembers her Amnesia* slowly moves away from accounts of a particular illness to general reflections about the body and mind. Brenner moves upstage to examine an original work of visual art that depicts life as an unfurling mass of color and line, messy but cohesive. She turns to the audience and blurts, "Who are all you people?" a question that epitomizes both her experience with amnesia and her life as an artist. By "people," Brenner may be asking who the audience is, or who are the people she has encountered throughout her career. Either way, audiences are inspired to reflect on their own experiences as they relate to her story. For both Brenner and OcampoWang, the stories they share are gifts.