

# Virginia Repertory Dance Company: *Fig Leaves and Open Letters*

**Performances:** April 6th, April 11th, and April 17th at 6pm  
**Virginia Repertory Dance Company Directors:** Ryan Corrison and Matt Pardo

This production is a part of the [School of Theatre and Dance's Spring 2021 Festival](#).

## Virginia Repertory Dance 2021 Company Members

Ashton Clevenger	Hailey Clevenger	Chloe Conway	Raeanna Grey
Ana Hart	Matt Haskett	Jana Kalivoda	Haley Labby
Lindsey McKim	Gregory Pergerson	Molly Philpott	Madison Riggs
Isabel Robles	Ammara Shafqat	Kinsley Stevenson	Caitlin Winkler

## Guest Performers

Darian Desrocher	Jason Fitts	Illiana Harris	Jordan Hundley	Abby Kelley
------------------	-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

## Virginia Repertory Dance Company 2021 Mission Statement

We are explorers. We are builders. We are a collective of young artists in motion, diverse in experience and background, united in purpose.  
We are joyfully committed to learning and discovering from each other and from the spaces and places we move through.  
We are pushing our physical and emotional peripheries.  
We acknowledge and celebrate the imperfect as a part of our process - we'll likely make a bit of a mess as we go.  
We want to share an experience with you, through dance, through ideas, and through connection.  
We are Virginia Repertory Dance Company '20-'21.

## **The Team:**

### **Choreography by:**

Virginia Repertory Dance Company, Ryan Corriston, and Matt Pardo

**Dramaturgy:** Zachary A. Dorsey

**Finale-Section Choreography and sound design:** Christian Warner

### **Location:**

Site-specific work at the JMU Quad, Alumnae Hall, Harrison Hall, and Wilson Hall

**Costume Design:** Pamela Johnson

**Costume Assistant:** Emma Mearns

**Stage Manager:** Deannie Lauterbach

**Assistant Stage Manager:** Claire Russell

**Stage Crew:** Annie Wegh, Ella Spruill, Sydney Rosario, Eliza Johnson, Claire Faas, Laura Mosier, Meghan Kosmela

**Sound** by Southard Audio Inc.

**Technical Director:** Emily Becher-McKeever

**Technical Assistant:** Matty Wolfson

**Covid Compliance Supervisor:** Chloe Waters

**Production Manager:** Brian Smallwood

### **Special Thanks:**

Dr. Margaret Mulrooney, Tom Carr, Eamonn Farrell, Jordan Wood, Virginia Ballard, and Cecilia Apperson

**Music and Sound Design:**

**Toby Twining\*, Christian Warner\*\*, and Antonín Dvořák †**

**In order of appearance:**

“Though the City Heaves with Exhaustion”\*

Text by Konstantin Kulakov

(excerpts from “The Greatest Speech Ever Made,” performed by Charlie Chaplin)

Recorded and mixed by Mark Rubel, Pogo Studio, Nashville TN

“Swarming”\*

Kissing Rock Montage\*

(excerpts from Sleater-Kinney “Jumpers,” Twining WICBM, Brown String Quartet—the Concord Quartet, “I Want to Talk About You”—John Coltrane Quartet)

“DvRořák”\*†

(excerpt from String Quartet No. 12, II—Pavel Haas Quartet)

“Circle Quartet”\*

(excerpts from 9:11 Blues—Matt Haimovitz, Cello)

“Open Letter”

Text: The Virginia Repertory Dance Company

Voice over recording session engineered by Tom Carr

Choreographic Title: “For The Goodness of Men”\*\*\*

Music Credit:

“America the Beautiful” by 5 Alarm Production Company (2019)

“1%” by Aisha Devi (Houndstooth / Fabric Publishing 2005)

“Window” by The Album Leaf (Sub Pop Records 2004)

“The Greatest Speech Ever Made” by Charlie Chaplin

**Program Note: A Conversation Between  
VRDC Company Directors Ryan Corrison and Matt Pardo  
and Dramaturg Zachary Dorsey**

**Zachary Dorsey:** What does VRDC look like in a normal year?

**Ryan Corrison:** In a normal year, the VRDC spends the fall working with four or five guest choreographers as well as two dance faculty members to create a repertory concert. Each guest choreographer usually has a five day residency where they set or create a piece on the company. These pieces are then rehearsed for the rest of the semester and are performed on the Mainstage at JMU in December. All of these dances live on their own and are independent of each other, with no intentional connection across the pieces that make up the concert. In the spring, the VRDC performs this show again at Dogtown Dance Theatre in Richmond and other venues.

**Zachary Dorsey:** And what was VRDC's journey this year?

**Matt Pardo:** This year, the company and its directors worked to design a non-hierarchical company structure that would allow all its participants to have an equal say in the progression of the project and the construction of an evening-length work. With this new structure in mind, the company not only spent time crafting some of their own choreography, but also worked together to develop a company mission statement and to conduct research that inspired and informed their choreography. VRDC was designed this year to give students the opportunity to experience the development of an evening-length project from the ground up, similar to what they would experience in the professional world. The social reckoning we have all gone through in the past year was a large inspiration for this work. The dancers spent a majority of the year working to understand their own experiences and privileges on the JMU campus, so that they could articulate how they could better themselves and their communities in the fight for racial and gender equity in the spaces and places they regularly occupy here at JMU.

**Zachary Dorsey:** In what ways did the students' work this year mirror the kinds of collaboration and creative processes you've had in professional dance companies?

**Matt Pardo:** The professional collaborations I have witnessed and been a part of previously were very much mirrored in this process. In my experience, successful collaborations occur when artists/participants make space for each other and for differing views. I have witnessed this type of collaborative success between artists such as Philip Glass, Lucinda Childs, Frank Gehry, and many more who have worked with each other in self-designed processes that

reflect all of the participants involved in a final product. This process yielded a final product that is truly indicative of the many different artists that it involved.

**Ryan Corrison:** Most of my professional work has involved being a part of companies where the choreographer is the artistic director, and more or less choreographs the piece. Certainly in that process there was agency as a performer and we were a part of the creative process. However, the choreographer was the main “shaper” of the dance. With that said, the site-specific work I have done in the past actually mirrors this experience with VRDC more, in that the choreographers relied heavily on the dancers to “investigate” and “research” the location and build material that was unique to that particular area.

**Zachary Dorsey:** What was your most memorable or meaningful moments from this process?

**Ryan Corrison:** On a cold November evening we were running Christian Warner’s piece for the first time in months in the Warsaw parking garage, making sure we hadn’t forgotten it. The piece was created in February of 2020, just before the pandemic began. As I watched the dancers run this piece, tears just started streaming down my face as I saw the connection the dancers had with each other and this work. I was struck by how much their lives had changed in the last nine months, and yet their perseverance and fortitude was overpowering and inspiring. That moment is an example of the power of art, and how it connects and brings people together to experience something unique.

**Matt Pardo:** This evening-length work, developed over two semesters, was process-focused and was therefore not always linear or coherent - it wasn’t always clear what we were creating. The most memorable moment for me occurred in the recent weeks when the results of all the hard work from the past academic year came together so beautifully and all the parts cohered. After the first run of the full work, I felt an amazing amount of pride in the students’ commitment to the process and in the product it was yielding.

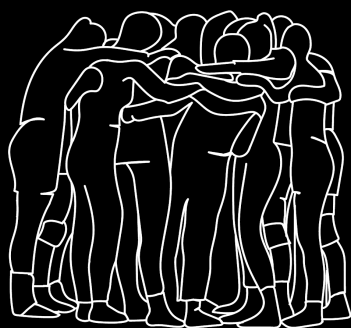
**Zachary Dorsey:** And I can offer up that there were a number of moments not just during in-person rehearsals but also in large and small groups in meetings via Zoom where there was a tremendous sense of accomplishment after a presentation of research or in the creation of a co-authored document like the mission statement or the open letter. The dancers were exhausted *and* exhilarated by this year’s strange journey, but together they so beautifully articulated who they are and what they want to do in the world.

**Zachary Dorsey:** What do you feel these students - some of whom are graduating in just a few weeks - are leaving behind?

**Matt Pardo:** I believe that these students are leaving behind a legacy of self-reflection. The open letter presented in this work provides a framework for us all to continue to move forward

from and with. This company of thinkers, movers, and artists has offered a way for us all to reimagine the spaces and places we regularly occupy and to do so with more accountability.

**Ryan Corrison:** These students are shifting, adapting, learning and overcoming. We have all grown as individuals through this process and have had our eyes opened in many ways. These dancers are leaving behind an example to all current and future students (and faculty) about what is possible when you stop thinking about what you can't do, and instead ask: "what are the possibilities and how can we make the most of a situation?"



VRDC 2020-2021

**Virginia Repertory Dance Company:**  
***Fig Leaves and Open Letters***