



NEWS RELEASE

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The Performance Project @ University Settlement presents FLOWFEST 2026

*New Original Works by University Settlement Fellows at Speyer Hall,
Lower East Side Theater, from September 30th through October 3rd*

New York City – *The Performance Project @ University Settlement* presents Flowfest 2026 with new original works created by University Settlement Fellows from September 30th through October 3rd, 7:30 pm at [Speyer Hall](#). This white box theater is located at 184 Eldridge Street within University Settlement's landmark headquarters. Theater, dance and performance art will be performed by the 2026 Fellows including: **Caleb Thomas; Isha Tobis Clarke; Joel Pipitone; LOUR (Lour Yasin); Mai'yah Kau, and Rafael Tillery**

The Lower East Side is full of artists from all walks of life, at every stage of their creative development. The Performance Project@University Settlement is designed to connect young local artists and emerging professional artists, ages 18 and over, to supportive environments where they can grow their practices, build relationships, and publicly present new work.

Fellows receive sustained mentorship as they develop skills in multiple and interdisciplinary performing arts such as spoken word, music and dance, and theater. Their new original work will be showcased at Flowfest 2026. The fellowship year culminates with each artist developing a portfolio of materials to support moving their projects and careers forward.

For tickets:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/flowfest-2026-4863679/>

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE: [Speyer Hall](#), 7:30 pm, 184 Eldridge Street, Manhattan

- Wednesday, September 30th, [Night one](#): Caleb Thomas and Rafael Tillery
- Thursday, October 1st, [Night two](#): Mai'yah Kau, Joel Pipitone and Rafael Tillery
- Friday, October 2nd, [Night three](#): Caleb Thomas, Isha Tobis Clarke, and LOUR
- Saturday, October 3rd, [Night four](#): Isha Tobis Clarke, LOUR, and Joel Pipitone

Melissa Aase, Chief Executive Officer, University Settlement, said, "The arts create opportunities for people to learn about themselves and bridge across differences, and for this reason they've

long been central to our efforts to build stronger communities. As we celebrate our 140th birthday as a downtown cultural and community development institution, we're thrilled that our programs continue to be places where talented young artists like this year's class of Fellows at The Performance Project are inspired to create new expressions. And it is particularly meaningful – and directly connected to our mission – that artists in our programs work in collaboration with our diverse neighbors, so that communities who are part of University Settlement can see themselves represented onstage in new work."

University Settlement Fellow Caleb Thomas
Performances on September 30th and October 2nd

Caleb Thomas said, "Being selected for this fellowship gives me the resources and support to explore the intimate relationship between performers and their audiences. My mind has been overflowing with ideas for nontraditional approaches to performance art, and I'm excited to dive deeper into the possibilities. I look forward to discovering new approaches and creating experiences that allow performers to engage with their craft in a more raw and honest way."

University Settlement Fellow Caleb Thomas is a 24-year-old queer Mexican-American performance artist from San Diego, California, now based in Brooklyn, New York. Their work is rooted in queer love and explores emotion and perspective through the lenses of relationships, culture, and religion. With over 13 years of dedication to their craft and a BFA in Modern Dance, Caleb continues to deepen their understanding of what it means to create while staying grounded in their identity as a performer. Though trained in various dance genres, their recent research over the past five years has focused on vogue femme and ballroom culture, exploring their connections to contemporary movement practices.

University Settlement Fellow Rafael Tillery
Performances on September 30th & October 1st

Rafael Tillery said, "I am honored to have been selected as a Fellow this year. I'm looking forward to the space that University Settlement's Performance Project offers for sustained artistic growth, mentorship, and reflection alongside a cohort of peers. I'm also especially excited by the opportunity to develop new work within a supportive structure that values process as much as presentation."

University Settlement Fellow Rafael Tillery is a Chicago-born, Brooklyn-based, dancer, choreographer, educator, and interdisciplinary performance artist who works across movement, image, drama, and ancestral memory. His creative research looks at improvisational performance practices as mystical, embodied strategies for survival, and a means through which to channel intergenerational knowledge from the past and future. He's interested in how these practices can help individuals and communities process emotions together.

Rafael has been performing professionally and as a freelance dance artist for more than a decade. He has danced with the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company II, Shen Wei Dance Arts, and the Modern American Dance Company, and performed work by choreographers such as Bebe Miller, Ronald K. Brown, Ronen Koresh, Nejla Yarkin, and Joanna Kotze.

He has contributed to dance education as a Visiting Professor of Dance at Austin Peay State University, and as a director of dance at KIPP Liberation College Preparatory. His choreography

has been presented at the American College Dance Association, the Tennessee Association of Dance, the Saint Louis Arts Alliance, and the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts. Rafael holds a B.A. in Theatre and Dance from Austin Peay State University and an M.F.A. in Dance and Choreography from Florida State University.

University Settlement Fellow Mai'yah Kau
Performance on October 1st

Mai'yah Kau said, "I'm looking forward to this fellowship to gather with other creatives to hear, share thoughts and downloads in a safe and supportive space. I'm excited to experience the magic we cultivate collectively and individually."

University Settlement Fellow Mai'yah Kau, also known as Maima, The Water Spirit, is an emerging queer Liberian diasporic interdisciplinary artist with roots in Staten Island, NY. Their work weaves together identity, heritage, and spirituality, blending traditional West African dance with contemporary queer performance to create ceremonial rituals and embodied storytelling. Mai'yah is a full-spectrum doula and birth worker as well as a burgeoning burlesque performer. These varied practices contribute to Mai'yah's ability to work across and beyond performance genres. Their work has been shown at Bronx Academy of Art & Dance, Movement Research @ Judson and the Snug Harbor Dance Festival.

Mai'yah is also a recipient of the Mertz Gilmore Dance Research Award, fellow of the Divine Fellowship with Public Assistants and Eureka! Press as well as 2024 artist in residence with Dancing Futures Residency with Papatian in collaboration with BAAD. Through movement and multidisciplinary art, Kau searches for ancestral narratives—both personal and collective as a way to honor heritage while imagining new futures. Their practice is an ongoing exploration of transformation, resilience, and the fluidity of cultural memory.

University Settlement Fellow Joel Pipitone
Performances on October 1st and October 3rd

Joel Pipitone said, "I'm so excited to be workshoping my satirical Edinburgh Fringe bound clown show Mike MikeDiablo's Masculinity Lessons! It's going to get weird, stupid, silly, and political in all the best ways. I can't wait to play with the audience!"

University Settlement Fellow Joel Pipitone is a playwright, director, and performer. They were nominated for Best Queer Performer and Best Show at Edinburgh Fringe Festival from Binge Fringe magazine for their show "Love". They were a finalist for the Goldberg Play Prize and SheNYC finalist for their play "Grandma" which also had a premiere reading at Rattlestick Playwright's Theater. They have workshoped their writing internationally at theSpaceUK as well as theaters in New York City. They were a finalist for the Film Fusion award for their screenplay "Baby Weight". They have been mentored by Suzan Lori-Parks and Mj Kaufman. They are a co-host to two monthly shows: Nonbinary Party and The Lex App Show. They teach monthly clown classes at Boyfriend Co-op. They believe in finding the humor and light in every story they tell.

University Settlement Fellow Isha Tobis Clarke
Performances on October 2nd and October 3rd

Isha Tobis Clarke said, "I am elated to be part of The Performance Project Fellowship this year! I look forward to collaborating with other emerging artists and receiving invaluable mentorship from the University Settlement team."

University Settlement Fellow Isha Tobis Clarke was raised in Oakland, CA where they studied the foundations of street and club dance and learned to use them to tell stories meant to call people to action. Isha has performed with Hip-Hop pioneers including Kurtis Blow, The Sequence, DJ Kool Herc, and MC Sha Rock. They have also toured with ground-breaking aerial dance company Bandaloop as well as the Ladies of Hip Hop Collective.

Isha has created several dance films including "Free" in collaboration with Marc Bamuthi Joseph and a commissioned piece for the SF Dance Film Festival, "Dear Black Girls". Isha was a 2024/25 artist-in-residence at the Kennedy Center's Office Hours program, prior to the Trump administration's disbanding of Social Impact programming at the center. Isha is currently based in NYC where they are a performer, choreographer, director, DJ, Restorative Justice Practitioner, and dance educator.

University Settlement Fellow LOUR (Lour Yasin)
Performances on October 2nd and October 3rd

Lour Yasin said, "Being selected as a Fellow is an incredible honor and a reminder of the power of community in nurturing artists. I'm excited to connect with fellow creatives, share ideas, and grow as an artist while contributing to a space that values collaboration, experimentation, and meaningful storytelling. This fellowship is an opportunity to expand the reach of my work, to learn from others, and to bring stories that reflect diverse experiences and voices to life in ways that resonate with audiences."

University Settlement Fellow LOUR (Lour Yasin) is a Palestinian actress, singer, writer, and composer based in New York City. Born in Jerusalem, her work centers marginalized voices, fusing Arab identity with genre-blending music and performance. She is the creator and star of "AREA D", the first Palestinian Arab pop musical, and a 2023 recipient of the Lin-Manuel Miranda Fellowship—becoming the first Palestinian selected for the program. Lour has performed internationally and alongside Tony Award-winning artists, and is known for her bold artistic voice that pushes boundaries across mediums. Her original works have earned her the William W. Kleinhandler Prize and the Ruth Scott Sanford Memorial Prize.

Lour's work spans theatre, film, and contemporary music, with an emphasis on storytelling as a vehicle for social impact. She is currently developing an EP and several stage projects that explore diasporic identity, resistance, and joy. Performing under the artist name LOUR, she aims to reclaim space for SWANA narratives and build community through radical honesty, musical innovation, and cultural pride.

About University Settlement

University Settlement partners with 40,000+ New Yorkers in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn every year to build on our collective strengths as we achieve healthy, stable, and remarkable lives. For 140 years, we've fought poverty and systemic inequality by building highly effective social services in collaboration with our neighbors.

Established in 1886 as the first Settlement House in the United States, we bring the values of our movement into the 21st century by meeting New Yorkers where they live, listening deeply to all perspectives and creating space for responsive cooperation. Joining with our neighbors to make stable foundations where people of all ages can grow and pursue their dreams, we build community strength.

Programs include early childhood education, youth development, healthy aging, mental health and wellness, housing advocacy and benefits assistance, English classes for adult immigrants, community centers, and the arts. Learn more at www.universitysettlement.org

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