

Bath Piece & Other Songs

a salon evening at Room & Board
with Leslie Allison



Thursday, April 30, 2015

Program

Bath Piece / upstairs bathroom

Performances will take place at 7:30, 8:30, and 9:30. Please see the person at the door to sign up.

Leslie got her first look at our outsized tub when Deborah and I had her over for dinner, to invite her for a residency here at Room & Board. That's when *Bath Piece* began to take shape. Leslie was inspired both by the important healing function of baths in her life as well as the intimate domestic projects of former Room & Board residents Daniel Fishkin and Samuel Budin.

Hunger Prayer / downstairs bathroom

"Hunger hurts, but starving works"

To celebrate her birthday, Leslie invited friends over to Room & Board for a group sing-a-long of Fiona Apple's 1999 "Paper Bag," a pop song that resonated strongly with her adolescence. "I'm not trying to exorcise that person," Leslie says of her former self. "This piece is almost more of a séance with her."

Emotion Potion Laboratory / kitchen

Cover drawing by Pia Bramley.

Video for Hunger Prayer by Vanessa Haroutunian.

Leslie, Julia, and Deborah would like to thank all the "Paper Bag" singers, as well as the Bath Piece choir, for their extraordinary generosity and talent.

Bath Piece chorus:

Leslie Allison is Room & Board's artist in residence for April, 2015. She is a writer and musician. Her first book of poetry, *Martha*, was released this month (Ugly Duckling Presse).

Laurel Atwell is a Brooklyn-based dancer, choreographer, interviewer, qi gong teacher, and sometimes cook.

Brooke Herr is a multimedia artist in Brooklyn. Her work centers around themes of embodiment—seeking to communicate experiential subject matter through images and sound.

Claire Wilcox is a writer living in New York. She also likes to sing for imaginary and real audiences both in and out of the tub.

Tonight's experiment: Emotion Potion Laboratory

Throughout Leslie's residency, we've been thinking about how the body processes emotion. To manifest this idea, we present our Emotion Potion Laboratory, based on the research of Dr. Robert Plutchik (1927 – 2006). We invite you to mix a potion that reflects your current mental state. Our hypothesis is that imbibing our emotions will bring our minds and bodies in closer contact. Your potion will also provide the ideal synaesthetic preparation to experience *Bath Piece*.

We encourage you to share your personal recipe (anonymously, if you prefer) in our Potion Log.

Libretto to *Bath Piece*

First Movement

Does this hurt? Does this? How about this?

Does this hurt? Does this? How
about this?

Does this hurt? Does this? How about this?

Does this hurt? Does this? How about this?

Does this hurt? Does this? How about this?

Does this hurt? Does this? How about this?

Does. This. Hurt?

Does. This?

How. About. This?

Second Movement

How can I bear this?

You bear it because you are still alive.

What do you have between your legs?

Hornets nest, hornets nest, hornets nest

Are you keeping clean?

Yes. As usual, bathing in my own filth.

What do you have between your legs?

Thorns touching thorns touching thorns touching thorns.

My genitals are real, they are how I feel.

My genitals are real, they are how I feel.

Impossible genitals

Thou can't define what is not thine!

Impossible genitals

Thou can't define what is not thine!

My genitals are real, they are how I feel.

Am I supposed to swallow?

I am into being hollow

Am I supposed to swallow?

I am into being hollow

Am I supposed to swallow?

I am into being hollow

Third movement

Ooooooooooooooooooooo

Ox hunger, ox hunger, ox hunger

Ox hunger

Baroque fortress soaked with ecstasy

Porous vessel rushing empty

Ox hunger

Baroque fortress soaked with ecstasy

Porous vessel rushing empty

Ooooooooooooooooooooo

Am I supposed to swallow?

Ooooooooooooooooooooo

Am I supposed to swallow?

Ooooooooooooooooooooo

Am I supposed to swallow?

Am I supposed to swallow?

Thoughts on *Bath Piece*

Julia Pelta Feldman

Leslie Allison's *Bath Piece* contradicts itself. Its materials transcend themselves, transfiguring instant-message fodder into aphorism and elevating the pop song to chamber cantata.

Its opening question—*does this hurt*—signals the theme of pain, which runs throughout the piece, but also heralds healing: it's what your mother asks you as she cleans a scrape, or a doctor as she seeks what ails you.

Dauntingly public and frustratingly private all at once, *Bath Piece* plucks at these distinctions. Some of the pain in the piece is personal, indeed biographical, but much of it feels very familiar, reminiscent of injustices we all suffer as adolescents (*thou can't define what is not thine*).

The text of *Bath Piece* also allows us to reimagine our former selves as actively responding to teenage traumas, rather than victims of them. It celebrates the “impossible genitals” of a newly sexual being learning that there is more to her/his/their parts than what others can see. It also casts an unusual light on bulimia, a topic that abrades the fringes of both *Bath Piece* and *Hunger Prayer*.

To swallow is to imbibe, but also to accept. I can think of few creatures coerced to swallow more than an adolescent girl. Her desires, her gender and its expression, her genitalia and their functions, are all assigned to her. Her own body is treacherous and frightening, a hornet's nest. Her expulsion of what has been forced into her may constitute a rebellion against this lack of control over her body and life.

The chorus sings: *Ooooooooooooooooooooo*. An open mouth: to accept or to emit? If bulimia is a private expulsion of what one finds ugly and unwanted within, a rejection of others' imperatives, and an expression of self-doubt, then its opposite is not digestion, but song. Rather than absorb and internalize, we transform and vocalize. *Bath Piece* is about healing, but it is also a remedy.

R o o m & B o a r d is an artist's residency and salon that takes place at my apartment here in Williamsburg. Leslie Allison has been artist-in-residence for April, 2015.

Director: Julia Pelta Feldman // President: Deborah Peña

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