



Charles Slender-White, choreographer of 'Split.' and founder of FACT/SF. (Robbie Sweeny)

Choreographer Charles Slender-White opens a peep show meets escape room experience at CounterPulse Festival

By **7x7 Editors** Sep 08, 2021

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Charles Slender-White is a San Francisco–based choreographer, fairly new (gay) dad, and alleged recovering fashion hound with a passion for posing intriguing questions in his work.

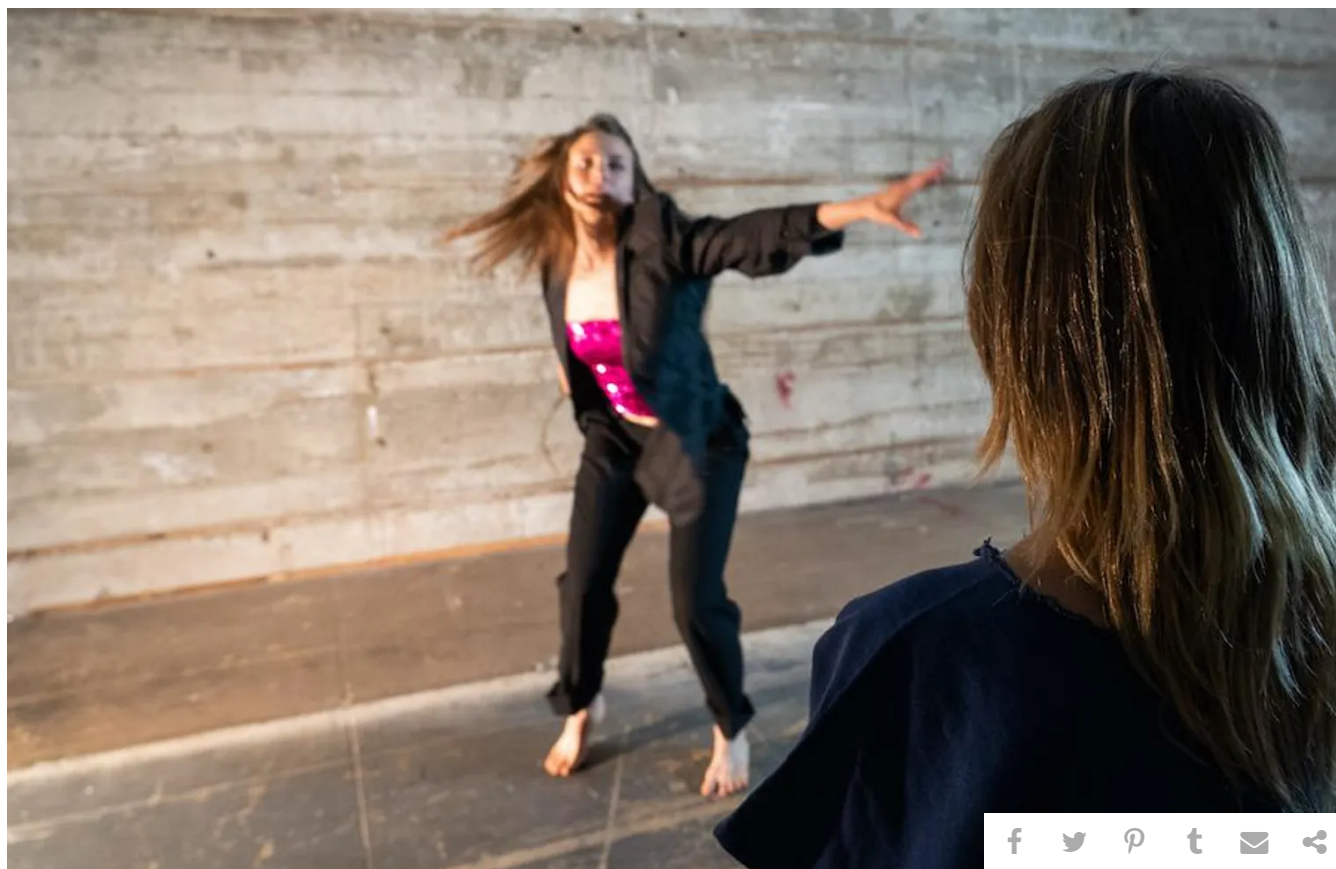
This time around that means, *Split*, his new piece that begins its run as part of the CounterPulse Festival on September 9th and continues after the festival's end, through the October 30th.

But here's the thing: Each of the 300 performances will be performed by a single dancer for an audience of one, and last for just 15 minutes. And get this, you the audience member will be behind plexiglass enjoying it (if you like) with a nice drink.

Is this contemporary dance designed for a pandemic or what?

Described perhaps cheekily as a "peep show meets escape room," the gist of *Split* is both simple and complicated: How do we become who we are, or perhaps more to the point, how do we *come to find out* who we are? Slender-White, founder of the dance company **Fact/SF**

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'Split' dancer Katherine Neumann.

(Robbie Sweeny)

7x7: You are originally from San Diego but have traveled, lived, and taught extensively around the world. But San Francisco is home— when did you move to SF and what drew you here?

CSW: As a Southern Californian, I always had the idea I would live here. I attended UC Berkeley from 2002 to 2006, moved to Russia in 2006, and then to SF in 2008. Arts, culture, politics, topography, it had it all. And in 2008 it was still relatively inexpensive, so a good place to begin a career. Which is exactly what I did.

Glen Park is not only a lovely part of the city to live in, but has a BART stop (hello SFO!). Any favorite haunts for food and drink you want to share?

I'm a regular at [Gialina](#). It's a casual place with good food. Thin crust pizza is their forte and I'm all about three of them: the Pistachio, the Yukon Gold, and the Four Cheese



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neighborhood, and it's the same with the restaurants.

When I leave the neighborhood, it's often for carbonara at Nob Hill Café or a martini at Local Edition on Market. I am looking forward to Local Edition's reopening, which coincidentally is scheduled for the same day as *Split* opens. I'm taking it as a sign!

Ok, those boots are something else and definitely have a bit of a "Who's Your Daddy" vibe, while also being very rooted in the world of fashion. Word is you're a bit of a recovering fashion hound—any story behind them?

Not technically in recovery, but yeah, those days are somewhat behind me. Partly because my closet is still pretty full of the gorgeous clothes I bought back then. I was a big fan of Hedi Slimane's minimalist aesthetic, so I acquired a lot of Dior.

The boots, I bought them for my 25th birthday. I was in Milan on a road trip from Warsaw. I was not all that interested in Tom Ford, but I entered his store, turned a corner, and there they were. It was like the heavens opened up, illuminating these beatific knee-high riding boots with gold zippers and buckles—they still feel just as amazing today as they did that first day I put them on. Only 20 pairs of these boots were made, so they feel pretty special and nearly bespoke, much as I'm hoping *Split* will feel for audience members.

You and your husband recently became parents for the first time, and *Split* is about identity and how we come to find out who we are. Is there a connection between the timing here?

Definitely. All the projects I conceive of are connected to my personal life, what I'm experiencing emotionally, or what's going on in society. My husband and I started to plan a family right around the same time that the concept for *Split* began to emerge.

Identities shift over time. They end. They begin again. It seems to me that one's identity is not ever fixed, but that maybe it shifts less frequently or less significantly after a certain age. Our present identity is always in conversation with our experienced past and the anticipated future.





What is it about finding out who we are that intrigues us so?

This is the nut of the whole project. I am noticing through the creation process that yes, there is a sense of self, but also there is another layer, which is how that sense of self gets articulated through words, actions, and relationships. Who we are versus who we think we are can be elusive, and when something is elusive or missing, we want to search for it.

Who knows, maybe that was behind that moment with the Tom Ford boots in Milan.

At what point do you think we really, I mean *really* figure that out?

We don't. But we become more familiar with the component parts.

Crucial to *Split* is the notion of a single dancer performing for a single audience member, with the two separated by a pane of plexiglass, which seems designed for life during a pandemic—is that how it came about?

Definitely a coincidence—we started fundraising for the project in 2019. We have since added elements into the show because of the pandemic, but the conceit was born out of a desire to offer a more individualized art experience. *Split* was supposed to happen last year and got cancelled because of the pandemic, but the timing is sort of perfect because folks are so hungry to see live art again.

In terms of identity and the pandemic, we understand that your favorite cocktail is the martini, true? And if so, what is it about the martini?

Yes, it is my favorite. I'm a fan of the Navy Strength Gin from [Spirit Works](#) in Sebastopol. It's all so Pavlovian in a way, beginning with the weight of the glass in the hand during prep, before the taste, before that cool rush cor



. For me, the martini indicates on a



And finally, speaking of identity, if you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?

A wave in the Pacific Ocean.

// Split opens Thursday, September 9th at CounterPulse and runs through the end of October; tickets (\$15 and up) are available at counterpulse.org.

Images can be found here — including the one with the boots and the Who's Your Daddy vibe (all credited) <https://photos.app.goo.gl/BuLrnUStb2vindbGA>

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