



Split dancers Keanu Brady and Katherine Neumann | Credit: Robbie Sweeney

When choreographer [Charles Slender-White](#) goes to see live performance, he considers what kind of experience is offered, if he’s seen something similar, and if there are ways it could be enhanced. He questions his own work in the same way.

“I ask myself what types of works have I not made or seen, and I continue to ask new questions of myself and my collaborators and to the public,” he said. “The intent is to make a new piece of art, not just a riff on the same.”

That led Slender-White and his dance company, [FACT/SF](#) to create *Split*, a series of 300 one-on-one performances starting Sept. 9 at [CounterPulse](#). Each show will last 15 minutes and will be performed by a single dancer for an audience of one.

In 2018, White did a piece, [death](#), where as a part of the show, audience members were led downstairs to three corridors, with a performer in each corridor. The audience member would spend about two minutes in the corridor with a performer. That started him thinking about *Split*.

“It had so much potential for intimacy. It was almost like a bespoke experience, and there was a lot more juice to be squeezed out of that,” Slender-White said about the experience with the one-on-one performances in *death*. “Over the past three years, it’s been more and more clear to me the societal interest in connecting in intimate ways. Especially since we’ve been denied proximity for the last

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In creating *Split*, White wanted to explore how our identities were formed. He did interviews with people about that as well as taking inspiration from Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (which premiered in San Francisco, near to Counterpulse’s location) and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which he sees as about how we form ourselves.



Split choreographer Charles Slender-White | Credit: Robbie Sweeny



Split dancer Katherine Neumann | Credit: Robbie Sweeny

In 2020, Slender-White saw Laurie Anderson’s virtual-reality piece *To the Moon* at New York’s Public Theater. He and the other audience members were met at the door, taken to an elevator, and ushered to their seats, while being given instructions as to what would happen and what to do along the way. To Slender-White this all felt very considered and made him feel prepared for the experience, and he wants to create a similar kind of mood for *Split*. Audience members will be led downstairs, offered a beverage, taken to a room with photos of the dancers and community members White interviewed to create this piece, then go to a room with an audiovisual element, and finally be taken to their chairs for a 15-minute performance.

Vaccinations are required, a barrier will be between the performer and the audience member (who will each have an air purifier), and those in the audience will wear masks. Slender-White hopes all this will help ease people’s anxiety.

“My hope is that it will be a rich and intimate experience,” he said. “I want it to be nonconfrontational intimacy.”

Split runs Sept. 9 – Oct. 30 at CounterPulse, 80 Turk Street, San Francisco. [Ticket information is available here.](#)

Emily Wilson lives in San Francisco. She writes for radio, print, and the web, including Smithsonian.com, Daily Beast, 48 Hills, Hyperallergic, Latino USA, Women’s Media Center, California Magazine, and SF Weekly. She also teaches adults getting their high school diplomas at City College of San Francisco.

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