



## AYESHA MANSUR GONSALVES

[ayeshamansurgonsalves@gmail.com](mailto:ayeshamansurgonsalves@gmail.com)

416.302.4352

### **Curriculum Vitae | Course of Life**

“My trajectory has been non-linear, my skill set, varied and strong. I am a creator and performer with a background in film, dance, and theatre. My process is informed by technique and grounded in instinct with an epic toolbox at my disposal. I am a storyteller, through and through. No matter the medium.”

#### **Earl Haig Secondary School, Claude Watson Arts Program - Dance Major**

Toronto, Canada | 1990-1994

Even before my first ballet class at age four, dance was my initial method of self-expression. By the time I attended EHSS I was deeply committed. Attending an arts high school was as close as I could get to being on *Fame*. Of making my dreams a reality. I learned that I could make a career for myself doing what I loved. By the time I was sixteen I was performing professionally, earning money with my art. Earl Haig is where I choreographed my first official dance piece. Where I learned how to create and produce work, and where I fell deeply in love with that process.

#### **Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, Independent Study 2-yr Program**

New York City, USA | 1994-1995

Going to this prestigious dance school in NYC was a dream come true. It was also the toughest training of my life. Dancing eight hours a day, learning new disciplines and techniques. I fought through both mental and physical pain. I choreographed a piece on my fellow students, but soon after, my body gave

out on me and I had to leave the program a year early. This wasn't going to be a quick fix. I was devastated and returned to Toronto unsure of what to do next.

### **Womb Dance Company - Co-Founder, Choreographer, Teacher, Dancer**

Toronto, Canada | 1997-2001

After two years of working to pay the rent, raving my butt off, and traveling to Bosnia as part of a Canadian Armed Forces show tour, I finally had my own dance company. Co-founded with a woman I'd met on the dance floor of some warehouse party, our aim was to create shows that were immersive, that told stories of our present and ancestral past. We were breaking the fourth wall long before others followed suit. Creating and managing the production of full-length shows was vital to my development as a storyteller. This is also when I started my teaching career, further honing the ability to convey my ideas to a wide range of individuals. A skill that would prove most useful over the course of my career.

### **The Misses: Much Music**

Toronto, Canada | 1998

During the Womb years, I also delved into video art. I had a little Hi-8 camera and two VCR's that I used to edit the footage, ending up with some truly wacky and hilarious material. After applying for a VJ position at Much Music, Denise Donlon (director of music programming at the time, and Order of Canada recipient) called me into the office because "she had to meet the woman who made these videos." After weeks of vetting, I didn't end up getting the job, but my experience with Denise and the joy of shooting, editing, and creating my own 'films', filled me with possibilities and opened my eyes to alternate methods of storytelling.

### **Fate: September 11, 2001**

New York City, USA

I moved back to New York after Womb collapsed under the weight of adulthood. The timing was unfortunate as 9-11 happened just four months after I arrived. The World Trade Center was right across the water from where I lived so I witnessed the tragedy first-hand, and in its entirety. This event collided with the realization that dance was no longer a viable professional option for my consistently injured body. The whole reason for my return crumbled. The following two years were dark, hedonistic, sad, and very, very lonely. Peppered with work in my brother's woodshop, painting Macy's window displays, bartending, and the occasional theatre performance. Miraculously, I woke up at the age of twenty-six, brushed the fog out of my eyes and decided it was high time to get myself an education.

## **City University of New York, Brooklyn College - BA Film Production**

Brooklyn, USA | 2004-2008

My initial goal of attending film school was to become a documentary filmmaker. My eyes had fully opened to the ills of the world at large, and I wanted to say something about it. The program itself, however, was mainly narrative, so I went with it and discovered I could write. I also had an instinct for cinematography and lighting. We shot on 16mm film. We edited on a flatbed. My thesis film *Friendly Fire* was accepted into the school's film festival. I wrote, directed, starred in, and edited this film. It was a revelation. My faculty encouraged me to not only keep writing, but to explore acting as well. I graduated magna cum laude with a 3.8 GPA. Go me.

## **Bionic Media - Client Services**

New York City, USA | 2008-2009

After graduation I worked at this commercial production house, catering to their clients every need. I hoped that I'd be able to move up the ladder to a more production-based position, but there was no space for that at the time. Being there however, allowed me to observe the flow of production, get a more inside look at the relationships between each department, and understand the dynamic between client, agency, and post-production. This was the business side that I had yet to experience.

## **Before: The Ramblings of a Former Dancer, One-woman show**

New York City, USA | 2008

During this time, I also studied acting at The New School and with Jason Bennett Actor's Studio. I'd dabbled in acting throughout my life but had never taken it seriously. My desire to get back on stage combined with the honing of my creative voice, got my system pumping in all directions. As much as I had tried to disengage from performance, I could not dissect it out of my life. I created this multi-disciplinary one-woman show, which included elements of dance, and a short film for good measure. I started to accept the idea that my work didn't have to be one thing.

## **Life Change: Back to Toronto**

Toronto, Canada | 2010

After a life-altering and exhausting nine years in Brooklyn, I made the wise decision to move back home. I quickly acquired a principal acting agent, booked a few gigs, and became a unionized actor. I performed *Before: The Ramblings of a Former Dancer* a year after returning and continued to write

scripts ranging from theatre to film to TV to web series. The acting bug had taken a strong hold and my success as an actor continued to grow.

### **Peace Camp, Children's Peace Theatre - Artist Guide**

Toronto, Canada | 2012-2015

I worked as an artist guide at this social justice camp for children ages 6-12, for three consecutive years. Each summer we put on a full-length theatrical production dealing with issues that ranged from racism, gender discrimination, classism, migration, xenophobia and several other social justice issues. Guiding these young minds, learning from them, and opening up areas of darkness was an incredible and enlightening process. Their capacity to understand what we perceive as complicated, 'adult' issues was eye opening. I watched many of the same children grow each year and felt honoured to be a part of their educational and artistic journeys. It also cultivated my love of mentorship and working with youth.

### **Emotional Creature by Eve Ensler - Choreographer**

Toronto, Canada | 2014-2015

Throughout my life, teaching was a constant. As my acting career grew, I supplemented my income with various joe jobs as well as legitimate work in theatre. Sure, I performed, but I was also given the opportunity to use my knowledge of dance and choreography, in a number of theatrical productions. This was one of them. We produced this show twice, with two different casts populated by teenage girls. This process further solidified the mentor in me. I had never experienced mentorship myself and felt it was important to provide guidance to these young girls. I also had a knack for it. I knew instinctively how to connect with them, to draw out whatever latent talent existed, and bolster their wavering confidence. I am still in contact with many of them and continue to advise them to this day.

### **InspiraTO Theatre Festival, 10-min Play Festival - Playwright**

Toronto, Canada | 2014

My dystopian 10-minute play, Golden Egg, was mounted as part of this theatre festival. Unfortunately, the production turned out to be in complete opposition to the tone of the script I'd written. It was the first time that I wasn't in complete creative control of my own work. I had to learn the hard way how important it was to stand your ground. Communicating my vision to the entire creative team was challenging and, though the end result was hard to watch, I learned a valuable lesson through this experience.

**AMG Youth, Pre-Professional Dance on Film Program - Artistic Director,  
Choreographer/DP/Editor**

Toronto, Canada | 2014-2016

Dance was still a part of my life, but I had moved it from stage to screen, which was much more manageable for my body. I had made some short dance films and, after years of teaching dance, decided to create this program as a way to prepare dancers for their inevitable futures on camera. It also brought mentorship back into my life. Over two years we created three short dance films. These girls had never previously worked on camera and at least one of them has gone on to become a dance/film artist in her own right.

**Keeper by Tanisha Taitt - Director**

Toronto, Canada | 2015

I now had someone else's play in my hands. Being at the helm allowed me to correct the wrongs I'd experienced during the InspiraTO festival. The writer and I spoke extensively, as I wanted to make sure I was respecting her intention. As a performer myself, I was able to communicate effectively with the actors, and my history of creating full-length dance performances combined with an instinctive understanding of stage movement, informed my choices for stage direction. It was a personal success, and I wanted more of it.

**Theatre Work – Actor**

Toronto, Canada | 2015-2017

Over a three-year period, I played in a few notable theatre works. As 'Emilia' in *Othello*, for Driftwood Theatre, the 'Lead' in a cross Canada, multi-disciplinary theatre piece about the life of Sir Wilred Laurier, entitled *Laurier*, produced by Theatre New Brunswick/Confederation Centre. Lastly, I played 'Paulina' in Dauntless City Theatre's summer production of *The Winter's Tale*.

**Disagreeable, Web Series - Creator, Writer, Actor**

Toronto, Canada | 2015 (new iteration 2023)

Inspired by my family- a bunch of argumentative, crotchety and loveable cuties- Disagreeable is funny and sharp. I had already made significant headway when I took on a creative partner. We pushed forward with a writer's room, but soon after that, tragedy hit. We had just shot the teaser when the actor we'd hired to play the lead character's father, passed away suddenly. This loss led to a falling apart of sorts. Momentum waned as I and several members of the creative team got busy with other projects. Disagreeable was tabled. It sat, in the back of my mind (and on my hard drive), waiting for the right moment.

## **The Full-Time Actor**

Toronto, Canada | 2016-present

Though I started acting professionally in 2010, I didn't pour my entire focus into that endeavor until I suffered burnout from decades of having my finger in 'too many pies'. All my life I was told to focus on one thing. Clearly, I did not follow that advice. I was a multi-faceted artist and performer, so I stood my ground. Until the ground began to crumble. I had spread myself thin with teaching, work as an editor, acting, joe jobs, and projects that were labours of love, but did very little for my bank account. It was time to create a healthy and balanced life for myself. I decided to take everyone's advice and put all my energy into one thing: my acting career. I put down the proverbial pen, closed up shop, and focused on the craft. And, it worked. I became a full-time actor. I made a living. Sure, I still had ideas- I'd write them down, never to be looked at again. I created characters and put them on Instagram. I made little dance videos and put those on Instagram. I was non-committal. Until the pandemic hit.

## **Life In The Time Of Corona, Webshow – Creator, Writer, Director, Cinematographer, Actor, Editor**

Toronto, Canada | 2020-2021

When Coronavirus reared its ugly head and I was left with ample time on my hands, I did what any frustrated artist would do- I made art. I decided to throw away all the technique and formulas I'd been taught over the years and just follow my instincts. Producing my ideas requires one hundred percent of my energy and time. Something I wasn't able to allocate in the past. I've projected my laser focus onto this show, onto four of the characters I'd previously created, and it's turned out to be the most authentic expression of my creative voice I have ever made. I'm still creating new episodes and brainstorming ideas for the future of these characters.

## **HERE, Short Doc-Style Film – Director, Writer, Cinematographer, Actor, Editor**

Toronto, Canada | 2020

I submitted this short to the Isolation Film Festival, which took place just over a month after the pandemic lockdown hit. As opposed to my usually comedic work, I wanted to address the real feelings that were happening in these uncertain times. It's an exploration of where I've come from, and how these experiences inform the present moment. I am proud of this short. It reveals things about myself that no one knows. It is raw, slightly dark, and brutally honest. It is me, in a nutshell. I am now writing a doc-style feature entitled *Good Grief*, which is inspired by this film.

## **The Here and Now: Works in Progress**

### **Disagreeable, Web Series - Creator, Writer, Actor**

Lindsay ON, Canada | 2023

I have finally returned to my sit-com. After moving to Lindsay, ON with my husband, sister, mother, and stepfather, this show has taken on new meaning. Living with your adult sibling, parents (one of whom has Alzheimer's), along with your husband, is both challenging and totally hilarious. This new iteration of Disagreeable feels complete, and much more interesting. Having completed the pilot episode and pitch deck, I am currently pitching the show, and crossing my fingers.

### **A Woman, Short Film – Writer/Director**

Lindsay ON, Canada | 2023-2024

Currently polishing the script, this visually stunning short film was born out of middle-aged frustration. Menopause, irritability, societal rejection, and marital issues- it's all there. As a gather my team, I look for ways to fund production so we can go to camera by fall 2024.

### **Eight Million Stories, Cabaret Show – Writer/Performer**

Lindsay ON, Canada | TBD

Piecing together the many stories from my life, I decided to create a cabaret show that encompasses music, dance, acting, and film. This multi-media piece will involve other actors performing flashback moments from my past, as I narrate from downstage. There will be lip synching, there will be actual singing, there will be stand-up style story-telling, and black and white faux documentary footage. It is at times extravagant, and other times brutally real. Both funny and deeply serious. It questions the notion that only the young are interesting and worth attention. It illustrates that we all have 'eight million stories' to tell if we are fortunate to live long enough.

#### **Links:**

- HERE: <https://youtu.be/UU6lyCHzJIE>
- Life In The Time Of Corona, Ep. 10: Sonya's yoga class: <https://youtu.be/uFbFFr6IRP8>
- AMG Youth dance film, Close: <https://youtu.be/3nL6f0lfNz0>
- Keeper interview: <https://youtu.be/dmg86mTajN0>
- Acting Demo Reel: [https://www.imdb.com/video/vi505923353/?ref=nmvi\\_vi\\_imdb\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/video/vi505923353/?ref=nmvi_vi_imdb_1)

