

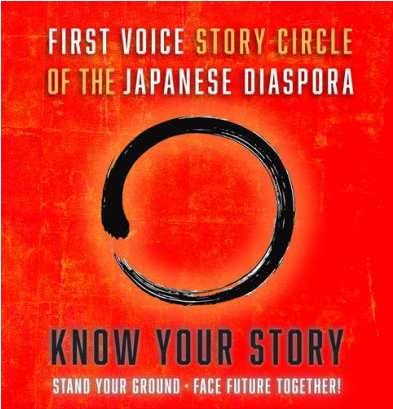


First Voice Flowers and Jewels - Please follow the links to experience the power of the work!

NAME/DATE	DESCRIPTION	FLOWERS IN BLOOM
<p>Earth Dance Offerings (2020)</p>	<p>The Earth Dance project was a direct response to the negative impacts Covid-19 had (and continues to have) on the performing arts. With mini-grants we commissioned 36 artists to create an offering, through video, to Mother Earth, in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. The campaign was picked up by the National Storytelling Network and used for a 4-day international online Storytelling Festival. First Voice publicly promoted the artists' work and contact information and many of the artists received additional work from the project.</p>	  <p>Earth Dance 2020 Artists</p>
<p>Annual Story Circle of the Japanese Diaspora (2021-2023)</p>	<p>Online intergenerational gathering including artist presentations, storytelling, and facilitated small group discussions.</p> <p>The 2021 event supported 21 artists, speakers, and culture bearers. San Francisco's Third Poet Laureate created a poem titled We Are One. Artist tashi tamate weiss created a video titled We're Still Here: Japanese in America.</p> <p>The 2022 event supported 5 spiritual leaders, 12 artists/culture bearers, and 5 musicians. With each year approximately 100 audience members participated from throughout the country and abroad.</p>	 <p><i>"... I felt like, in terms of my culture, there was that feeling of a part of me that I did not need to explain. I was seeing many different magnificent iterations of my culture in different lifetimes, learning a plethora of cultural richness by the second. By dance, by museum, by film, by poetry, by song, by longer projects, by stories, you do not realize how needed it is to hear these cultural stories in every different form of communication of art until you do; it is world-defying and life-changing."</i> - participant testimonial (2021)</p> <p>The 2021 Story Circle focused on stories from mixed-race Black and Japanese women. They spoke about what it was like to grow up in SF Japantown, be acculturated Japanese but perceived <i>only</i> as black, and challenges they faced during the wake of George Floyd's murder (including worries about their Black fathers). When attacks on Asians increased, they were worried about their Japanese mothers. They felt like no one would understand the "whole" of them. Belonging to "both" and "neither" at the same time is a common experience for people of mixed-race. Given the history and continued presence of</p>

anti-blackness in Asian American communities, hearing the stories from Tomiyuri, Moira, and Sarah was incredibly powerful, educational, and necessary.



Assimilation is annihilation. When I came to the US I chose to go by my English name because I felt fear that I would be rejected. I wish I had not gotten rid of the part of me that signified I was Japanese. It still hurts. Rob's story of being yonsei and not knowing if they were Japanese enough also spoke to me.” - participant testimonial (2022)

Moments (2020-2023)

Life is made up of moments that turn into memories that turn into stories that become history. But at any given moment, there are an infinite number of choices and each choice changes everything. The purpose of Moments is to gather together with music, dance and story and experience the moment.

Salons focusing on artists (emerging and mature) who are serious about growing the cultural continuum. Financial compensation and studio space is offered to support the creation of a new work. Launched pre-Pandemic, this program has supported [Solate](#) (**password: solate**) (a folk music quartet of next-gen multiracial musicians) with completing a CD that was then toured internationally, Mas Koga with completing a CD that helped him establish life as a professional artist in NY, Ayana Yonesaka (originally a mentee from Suite J-Town) with developing choreography that was later premiered at SF State in the form of a full length concert, and Moy Eng, a singer songwriter who used Moments to make an album that led her to become part of the Monterey Jazz Festival. These salons are containers for urgent processes of transmission, in which wisdom keepers share knowledge with people ready to receive the wisdom, and



(Solate performing in the First Voice studio)

use it to further deepen cultural roots.

Songs for J-Town
(2022)

An evening of Japanese American Jazz, the music that emerged from Black and Japanese artists fighting Redevelopment. The 12 performing artists were Black, Japanese, and Filipino and all from the Western Addition (traditional Harlem of the West and home to Japantown). Compositions (Contrabass and Sho) were by Emmy Award-winning composer Mark Izu (director of the Asian American Jazz Festival for 20 years). The main stage production also included [song](#), [spoken word](#), storytelling, and video projection. With one sold out performance at the Presidio Theater we reached 600 audience members.

“The work celebrates the legacy and resilience of the people who have called San Francisco’s Japantown and Western Addition home since the 1930s. Known as the Harlem of the



West when it was a thriving African American nightlife district, the neighborhood was also a center of Filipino culture. A musical conjuring of the past, “Songs For J-Town” is also a gentle exorcism of the transformational trauma wrought by the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.” Mercury News



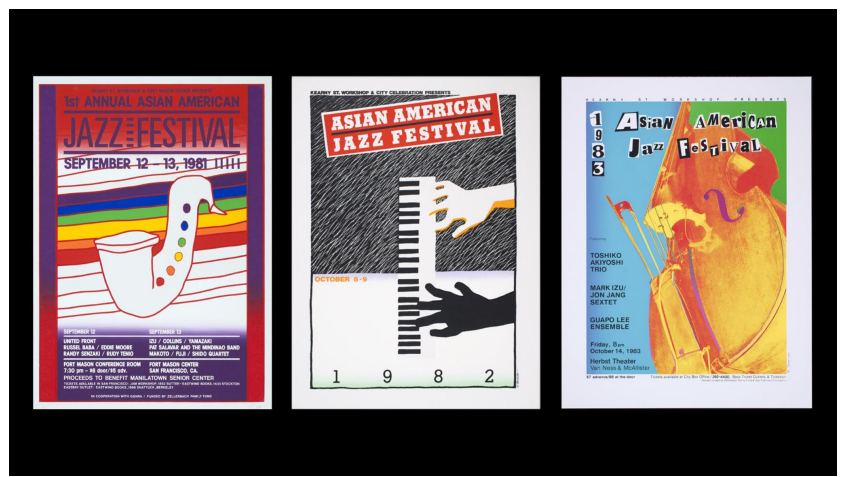
Sacred Tree that audience members were invited to contribute to.

“We always try to explain things, articulate things, but this, you could just feel and that was honestly the love through and through, and it felt deep,” she said of the show. “It felt very ancestral. It felt like something was ... definitely incited from the marrow of everyone’s bones.” - artist eryl kimura quoted in the Nichi Bei Times.

(photographs by Mark Shigenaga, featuring digital collage by Andi Wong)

**I'M AN
AMERICAN
(working
title)
(2022-2023)**

A documentary featuring Mark Izu, a father of Asian American Jazz, and his creation of Songs for J-Town. If it hadn't been for the Asian American Jazz Festival (directed by Mark for 20 years) so many Asian American Jazz Musicians would never have had access to a professional debut. The documentary, including interviews with artists, live performance footage, intimate recording session video, and archival materials, gives insight to Mark reflecting on his life and his community of Japantown. He shares what his music means to him and where his inspiration comes from.



**Angel Island
Pilgrimage
(2022)**

Between 1910-1940, 85,000 persons of Japanese descent entered through the Angel Island Immigration Station. In honor of this history Mark Izu and Brenda Wong Aoki performed a site-specific tribute to the Sun Goddess. This sold-out event was presented by the Nichi Bei Foundation in partnership with the Angel Island Foundation, the California Genealogical Society and the National Japanese American Historical Society. Audiences (450 people) came from JA communities in Seattle, Sacramento, Oakland, and all three remaining Japantowns.



Return of the Sun (2022)

WOCA (Women of Color in the Arts) commissioned Brenda to create a video titled Return of the Sun that was also used in Songs for J-Town. Brenda focused on the Sun Goddess, who appears in multiple cultures, as a way of building intersectional bridges.



San Francisco Soul (2021)

A film created by Brenda that incorporates true stories from her family's history in the nation's first Chinatown and Japantown. These stories are set against the backdrop of current-day San Francisco, where historical cultural districts are being dismantled, replaced by skyscrapers and tech companies, and decimated by the Pandemic. The film was shown through the Indiana Story Arts Festival in partnership with the National Storytelling Network, reaching over 1,000 audience members.



STOP ASIAN HATE (2021)

Brenda, along with two other Asian Artists, was invited by the Marsh Theater in SF to create a work that spread awareness about the rise of Asian Hate.

