

## what's in your suitcase?

Choreography & Text: Edisa Weeks in collaboration with Brittany Stewart, Delsa Heredia, Elise Walters, Jaria Morris, Leah Davidson, Liselotte Fana-Mejia, Sameerah Mohammed, Sheryl Miller

### Scene #1: El Sueño Americano

*Liselotte is downstage right on the stage extension, in front of the main curtain. She speaks her poem/story into a microphone.*

*Music: Monarch Butterfly, Beth Quist*

America  
El Sueño Americano  
I sold my car for a plane ticket  
I left working in a milk factory  
To be with my husband and get a better life

It all sounds so great until you get here  
I pictured BIG houses with lots of rooms like the ones you see in the movies  
I arrived to a basement with barely any furniture

The first two weeks I couldn't stop crying  
You see, I left my two little girls behind  
I pray they are safe  
As punishment for leaving them I stop eating white rice  
Yo amo el arroz blanco  
No white rice until mis hijas queridas are with me  
I didn't eat white rice for a year

New York City  
It was cold and snowing  
I walked 100 blocks looking for a job  
I found work in a Hair salon for \$60 a week  
I lost weight from working so much

I deepen my faith  
I go to school  
We shout with joy when our oldest daughter gets into college  
Y bailamos Danza Kuduro

La Mano Arriba  
Cintura Sola  
Da Media Vuelta  
Danza Kuduro  
No Te Canses Ahora  
Que Esto Sólo Empieza  
Mueve La Cabeza  
Danza Kuduro

## Scene #2: Traveling

*Liselotte's dance ends with her arms overhead. As she lowers her arms the curtain rises to reveal Jaria upstage left, slowly spinning with a bag.*

*Traveling Dance - performers enter from stage right traveling across the stage.*

## Scene #3: Factory/Hard Work

*Performers form a horizontal line upstage and in cannon throw their bag to the floor. They repeat picking up and throwing down their bag to eventually form a staggered line downstage. They step onto the bag to dance in slow-motion with their eyes closed.*

## Scene #4: What's in your suitcase?

*As the dancers talk they step off their bag to put them in a pile by the trap door.*

Jaria: Hey Y'all. What's in your suitcase?

Sameerah: Pepper pot!

Sheryl: Mangos!

Elise: Svengis!

Delsa: Mafongo!

Liselotte: Platanos con salami!

Brittany: Breadfruit!

Leah: Challah!

Sameerah: Sunshine!

All: Sunshine?

Sameerah: Yeah, the sun and the warm weather

Jaria: Que extrañas? What do you miss?

Delsa: El campo

Elise: Making music with family

Brittany: The feel of soft sand

Sheryl: Bumping to La Negra

Liselotte: La Playa

Jaria: House Parties

*Music: Happy, Bryan Stingley*

## Scene 5: House Party

*Note: Jaria begins pulling objects from the bags through the trapdoor for the house. Everyone helps build and then decorate the house. Objects:*

- roof triangles (3) + pipes (6)
- canvas for roof and walls
- The house frame (brought on from stage right – Brittany, Sherryl, Elise)
- curtains

## Scene 6: Migration stories

*Sameerah, Elise, Brittany, Leah sit on the edge of the stage and share the following stories and begin making flowers.*

*Jaria, Delsa, Liselotte and Sheryl do variations of the following:*

- *Take bustle skirts out of the bags and organize them on the floor, by the house.*
- *Finish decorating and setting up the house.*
- *Join in making flowers out of the plastic bag material.*

### Sameerah

I was three years old when mom and dad travelled to America leaving me, my 2 brothers and 4 sisters in Guyana with grandma. It took six years before they could sponsor us to join them. I was excited to be in America as we were going to be a happy family again.

After 31 years of living here my advice to anyone moving to America is, be prepared to work hard, and get an education, for without an education you have to settle for less. Also smile. Smiles are free and if you put a smile on your face and make someone smile, you have nothing to lose, rather you're gaining a smile from someone else.

### Elise

When "Poppy" left Sicily, he was leaving grinding poverty, a repressive government and excessive taxes. Lured to America by a Padrone who promised a guaranteed job, Poppy arrived in New York City where Sicilians were called:

*liselotte: Dirty Grease Ball*

*Sheryl: Spaghetti-slurping, Mafioso, WOP*

*Jaria: A real Guinea, right off the boat. Can't even speak English properly. Go back to where you came from*

The Homestead Act and the promise of 160 acres that a settler could own after five years of working the land, took Poppy and Great Grandma Antonia to Colorado. A gun battle in the center of town killed Poppy, ending that dream. Antonia sold everything, abandoned the land, and travelled with six kids to Buffalo where a relative owned a farm.

What has kept the family strong are faith, prayer circles, making music together and never giving up hope.

### Leah

My family was torn from Czechoslovakia and herded like cattle onto trains to the stench of Auschwitz.

Auschwitz took my mother, my sister, my brother. Only I survived

Munkatch

My Munkatch

זכור ושמור אותה

They are not forgotten

I arrive in London, and then New York City.

Sabbath is approaching and the streets are a whirlwind of

fumes, sounds, vitality  
My feet are tired  
I watch people board the bus  
It would be so easy to get on  
to let go

I see my mother's face  
I didn't survive the stench, the brutality, just to let go  
The tune לכה דודי rings in my mind  
A peaceful quiet sets in  
Have faith בטחון  
Have faith בטחון

*Note: Jaria, Sheryl, Leah, Delsa, Sameerah, Liselotte, take the flowers they have made, and then go into the audience to give people flowers.*

### Brittany

*Note: stand-up during this monologue*

My Nana would sing to me:  
I'm sad to say I'm on my way  
I won't be back for many a day  
My heart is down, my head is turning around  
I had to leave a little girl in Maypen town

My cousin/best friend got pregnant by an American soldier  
Hey, Mr., You left a little girl in Maypen!!

*(Wait for a response, when you don't hear one, continue)*

Nana also sang  
Brown skin girl stay home and mind baby  
Brown skin girl stay home and mind baby  
That wasn't going to happen to me  
I'm going to travel  
I'm going to see the Statue of Liberty

*Start solo – hand gesture – with the following lines...*

I'm going to college  
I'm going to get a good job  
I'm going to provide for my family

*group respond and cheer to each of the following statements.*

### **Scene 7: Duet**

*Brittany solo as Elise sings "Gracias a la vida"*

*note: Liselotte starts singing from the audience "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine". The entire cast joins in singing, and move back to the stage, put on a bustle skirt, a flower in their hair, etc.. As they sing the second verse "Every where I go, I'm gonna let it shine" the song transitions into a high energy, clapping anthem, manifesto. The "Carnival" music begins with the second stanza of "Everywhere I go".*

### **Scene 8: Circle Dance**

*Entire cast does the circle dance*

*music: Carnaval de São Vicente (Jazzy carnival mix) - Cesária Évora, François K. & Joe Claussell*

### **Scene 9: The Promise and realities of America**

*Performers come to the edge of the stage: music lowers in volume as dancers say:*

Delsa – We immigrated to America, because in America, I can say what I want

Sameerah – Practice my faith

Elise - Get an education, drive a car, and VOTE

Sheryl - Define my sexual identity

Liselotte –Never experience sexual harassment

Jaria – Never be shot by the police

Leah – Get the best medical care

Brittany – Become president

All: Yeeeeesss, etc.

Delsa: We immigrated to America, because in America we can be successful, fabulous  
and free, just like, just like,

All: YOU!

*music volume increases after YOU. The cast returns to dancing, and dance into the house as the stage goes to black.*