

Parmela Attariwala Program

Better the Well (2023), choreography by Sujit Vaidya
At Your Doorstep (2020), commissioned by Vancouver Intercultural Orchestra
Conversation with Ken, recorded audio by Ken Aldcroft
Serve and Volley: Kitsungi à Bob (2025)
Heme :: Stand Healing (2021), commissioned by the Esker Foundation
Frank (2008), choreography by Gitanjali Kolanad

CONTENT WARNING: reference to suicide by drowning

When I first heard that an ancestor had “jumped in a well”, I wondered if depression ran in the family. I came to learn that women, in particular, jumped in wells when there was no other societal option. Whether contending with shame, or with portending violence, for a village woman to choose a well meant that she, not her abuser, had control over how her life would end. In 1947, when the Indian subcontinent was violently torn apart into India and Pakistan, thousands of women chose wells, rather than becoming pawns of conquest. ***Better the Well*** was created in 2023 for a concert focused on war. It was choreographed by Vancouver-based bharata-natyam dance artist, Sujit Vaidya.

At Your Doorstep (2020) was commissioned by Vancouver Intercultural Orchestra (VI-CO) in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is dedicated to a number of my elders who passed away during that time, and for whom I could only grieve in isolated absentia. It is also dedicated to the first Canadian to die of COVID-19, a shopkeeper on Gerrard Street (Toronto’s “Little India”), who always had packets of saffron for me when I came to his shop. The form and musical content of *At Your Doorstep* comes from my interpretation of the first poem (of five) from the Sikh night-time prayer, Kirtan Sohila, and how I imagine a trained kirtanya might sing it in rag.

Ken Aldcroft was a guiding light of Toronto’s improvised music community—a virtuosic guitarist and extraordinary improviser whose boundless energy and infectious joy for life and music-making spilled over to all who entered his orbit. When Ken’s life was abruptly cut short by a heart attack, the community was devastated. We wouldn’t have the chance to play with him again: to attempt to meet in his formidable creative world. And so I asked Ken’s widow if she had any recordings of Ken playing alone. There were a few. I have purposely only listened to snippets of each, and I don’t know which one this will be. This is a way I can still engage in ***Conversation with Ken***.

Serve and Volley: Kitsungi à Bob (2025): Over the many years that I lived in Toronto, Bob Kajjoka’s home became my home-away-from-home for every holiday; and his supportive presence at my concerts and through my Ph.D., like that of a surrogate parent. Father of one of my dearest friends, Robert Michio Kajjoka was an esteemed virologist: the first Japanese Canadian to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto. He was also an accomplished visual artist, an amateur pianist, and an excellent chef. What Bob really longed for in life was to have been a professional tennis player—and he had the skills for it. But Canada and the sports world of his generation could not embrace having someone of Japanese origin in their ranks. Bob passed away in August.

Heme :: Stand Healing (2020) was commissioned by Calgary’s Esker Foundation gallery as a response to the exhibitions of Jeffrey Gibson’s *Time Carriers* and Nep Sidhu’s *Divine of Form, Formed in the Divine*. In lieu of having a permanent exhibition, the Esker Foundation commissions artistic responses to their temporary exhibitions. Detailed notes for the work can be found at: <https://permanentcollection.eskerfoundation.com/essays/parmela/>
n.b. The video on the *Heme :: Stand Healing* page contains an unrelated audio track.

Frank (2008) is dedicated to Frank Heintz, owner of the Toronto violin shop that took care of my violin for over thirty years. ***Frank*** was created in collaboration with my long-standing choreographic partner, Gitanjali Kolanad.