

# Shared Transmission: Two Artists Find Common Ground Between File Sharing and Double Dutch

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The four jumpers performing at *P2P* rehearsal.

*Sean Pressley*

**"Up. Up. One. Two. One. Two. Keep your feet in!"**

Two rope turners chant instructions as they twirl their lines in a fast eggbeater motion while a young girl jumps into the brief space between the strands. The soles of her sneakers make a soft, repetitive thud against the hard gymnasium floor. As she moves, her teammates' calls keep her in step. The FloydLittle double dutchers make it look like child's play, but what they perform could hardly be more difficult.

It isn't relegated to blacktops and playgrounds, either: On August 20, the award-winning team from Newark joins Brooklyn-based multimedia artists Dyani Douze and Salome Asega for *P2P*, an interactive performance at Knockdown Center that explores the matrilineal structure of double dutch, a jump rope game imported from the Netherlands four centuries ago, through the lens of modern technology.

The piece began last summer, when Douze saw a video of the FloydLittle team and wanted to work with them on a sound art piece. She invited Asega on a day trip to Newark. Seeing the athletes in action inspired something unexpected, says Asega. "We were interested in the way this team of double dutch girls communicate between each other," signaling instructions to one another while in motion; it reminded her and Douze of a P2P (peer-to-peer) network, in which files are shared directly between computer systems without the need for a central server. "The turners and the jumpers encourage each other, giving direction to the jumper inside of the rope so they'll be able to complete the routine," explains FloydLittle coach Shaquannah Floyd. This, says Asega, is a communication network that functions similarly to P2P. "There's no hierarchy," she says. "So it really relies on [sharing] information in this networked, collaborative way."

*P2P* is part of a larger installation co-curated by Douze and artist Ali Rosa-Salas called MAMI, which examines femininity and otherness in women of African and Caribbean descent. "The performance plays into that idea of having a collective of women working together to express a larger multiplicity of identities," says Douze. FloydLittle is one such collective: Floyd, who along with Laila Little founded the organization ten years ago, was a competitive jumper for over twenty years after sneaking into classes at age five at the Newark Boys & Girls Club. She's passed the talent on to her twelve-year-old daughter, Ivy, a jumper for the FloydLittle team. That knowledge sharing led Douze to create a piece for MAMI specifically with the team in mind. "They have this connection to each other through this sport, something they've bonded over [through the] generations," she says. "I thought it was so interesting that the coaches are women who have created a network for themselves."

Double dutch itself has a unique place in New York City history. Dutch settlers first brought the game to the city in the 1600s, but it wasn't codified into sport until 1973, when two former cops who had seen children playing on sidewalks ushered it into physical education classes; the area's first double dutch tournament arrived the following year. Since then, the image of little girls jumping rope on borough streets has been etched into the city's iconography, from Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* to Jay Z's "Hard Knock Life." FloydLittle continues the tradition, with several regional divisions and a local team of 45 jumpers,

ranging from third grade through college. They've won several championships, performed at the White House Easter celebration, and gotten their own Lifetime miniseries, 2015's *Jump!*

The jumpers performing in *P2P* are part of FloydLittle's exhibition team, the one that does TV and community performances. For *P2P*, they'll sport costumes designed by Asega, whose art often focuses on wearables. She's customized their shoes to light up on impact; their clothes and headgear include sensors attuned to their heartbeats, with LEDs that flare in time with the jumpers' individual rhythms. Douze composed a soundtrack to match – a piece that intersperses recordings from a June double dutch tournament at Rutgers University with stock sound effects to emphasize beats. She'll also manipulate live sounds captured by microphones on the floor in real time.

"They're telling each other things like, 'Keep breathing. Jump in. Jump out.' They have a hyperawareness of their movements that is very interesting, bonds that are created while they are jumping," she says. In addition to the electronic sounds, Douze is adding in mbiras (thumb pianos that "sound like rain") to build melodies – and connections with history. "The instrument is used in Zimbabwe to channel spirits," she says. "That ancestral connection is something we're also thinking about, [since] double dutch is a matrilineal structure within the black community in America."

Ivy and the young jumpers worked closely with their coaches on the choreography for *P2P*. "I wanted slow dance [moves] and facial expressions," says Floyd's daughter Ivy, naming music videos by Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Nicki Minaj as her inspiration. The slower movements are a deviation from the team's usual repertoire. "Usually, it's very fast," says Floyd. "There's more dancing in this performance."

For attendees, meanwhile, *P2P* isn't just for watching. Douze and Asega learned double dutch from the FloydLittle team recently and wanted to include an interactive component, so members of the audience will be invited onto the floor to participate. "We want [the audience] to be free-spirited," says Floyd, and to learn that the sport isn't as intimidating as it might seem. "Some people are scared to jump in...because they think the rope's gonna hit them," laughs Ivy. "But I hope the audience really enjoys it. I hope they're inspired."

***P2P* will take place at Knockdown Center (52-19 Flushing Avenue, Queens) on August 20. For more information, visit [knockdown.center](http://knockdown.center)**

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