

# thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Sam Tower

## New Maps from the Fringe Festival

by **Ellen Chenoweth**

In the Fringe Festival guide, producer Nick Stuccio asks, “The question is always, what will emerge from this collision of boundary-breaking shows? For 16 days audiences experience an explosion of artistic expression, creating a new map of our world – and possible worlds – as drawn by artists.”

I saw ten shows during the festival, not as many as some, but still a hefty amount of art experiences to sort out. I’m going through the memories, sifting to see what remains, creating connections between performances, questioning what that new map would look like. Here are some attempts at fragmentary answers.

Homegrown honey - Arielle Pina, *Unarmed*, *Lightning Rod Special*, *Underground Railroad Game*, Sam Tower + Ensemble, *901 Nowhere Street*

These three works were created, nurtured, and developed in Philadelphia by Philadelphia artists and represent the thriving scene of original performance work made locally. Not all of them were flawless, but I thought they were all consistently engaging, and I can’t wait to see what these makers dream up next. I feel lucky to live in a city with the many artists behind this trio of performances.

It’s hard to understand you - Ivo van Hove (director), *After the Rehearsal/Persona*, Jo Strømgren, *The Border*, Jo Strømgren, *There*, Joris Lacoste (director), *Suite n°2*, *Lightning Rod Special*, *Underground Railroad Game*, Pieter Ampe and Guillermo Garrido, *Still Standing You*

Many of the works had a theme of the difficulty of language, or the difficulty of communicating with another human. Whether they were friends, lovers, or co-workers, and whether they were grunting, singing, or silent, these folks were trying to reach out to someone else and having a rough go of it. But the struggle was clearly communicated to Fringe audiences.

Unexpected defensiveness - Joris Lacoste (director), *Suite n°2*

I thought I only had a very small nationalist bone in my body, tucked away somewhere non-essential, and noticeable only when doing something like touring Independence Hall. Instead it turns out I have a few nationalist bones, and *Suite n°2* managed to activate all of them with their performance of texts from various contexts all over the world. As we listened to a group of French artists re-enact some dark dialogue from the United States, like George Bush waging a war on terror, or a gay Mississippi teenager coming out to his unsupportive family, I found myself wishing they would turn their gaze on their own culture as well. Most unexpected to feel defiantly American at a Fringe show!

Black Lives Matter - Lightning Rod Special, *Underground Railroad Game*, Arielle Pina, *Unarmed*, David Zambrano, *Soul Project*

Current headlines of police violence were impossible not to think of while viewing these performances. Zambrano's topicality was less overt, but with Mozambiquan dancer Edivaldo Ernesto opening and closing the performance, and the relentless soul music, the black body was foregrounded here. In Pina's performance, Michael Pusey's body lay inert in front of us for the duration of the work, forcing an uncomfortable reckoning.

Men and masculinity - Jo Strømgren, *There*, Lightning Rod Special, *Underground Railroad Game*, Pieter Ampe and Guillermo Garrido, *Still Standing You*, Sam Tower + Ensemble, *901 Nowhere Street*

Two of these shows featured dudes messing around with each other, hanging out, horsing around. I haven't thought that much about male friendship in quite a while and these presentations made it seem like it would be fun to be a bro. It would be less fun to be a bro in the world of *Underground Railroad Game*, where Scott Sheppard was mocked and measured (literally). In Sam Tower's all-female noir vision, men are just shadows at the edges, providing an interesting counter-balance and an abundance of lady villains.

??? - Lucinda Childs, *Available Light*

No matter what lines of connection I draw, I can't make *Available Light* connect to anything else I saw at the festival. Childs' work *DANCE* blew me away several years ago, so perhaps my expectations were too high, but *Available Light* left me cold even as I was sweating in the Armory. The dancers were lovely, but it seemed they were executing a most grim and unpleasant task for the majority of the performance. Only in the last minute did I notice one had broken into a relieved smile, and only then did I feel some pleasure as well.

Memorable music - Arielle Pina, *Unarmed*, David Zambrano, *Soul Project*, Sam Tower + Ensemble, *901 Nowhere Street*

The music in this grouping was strong, sometimes to the point of overpowering any other element in the production, but always enjoyable. I was particularly impressed with the live music from Alexa Byrd in *Unarmed*, accompanied by Will Colella on guitar, and Lauren Tuvell's performance in *Nowhere Street*, crooning Patsy Cline classics (brave!) in an eerie, mesmerizing style.

Images I can't shake - Jo Strømgren, *The Border*, Lightning Rod Special, *Underground Railroad Game*, Sam Tower + Ensemble, *901 Nowhere Street*, Ivo van Hove (director), *After the Rehearsal/Persona*

Emilie Krause at one end of the dark basement that hosted *901 Nowhere Street*, caught in a spotlight, about to be in big trouble. The grey walls of the examination room in *Persona* suddenly falling away to reveal a spacious, glimmering, watery landscape. Jennifer Kidwell posed as a living Mammy figure and then slyly revealing one bare leg, the stereotype shredding as the sexual violence of slavery came to the center stage. Ivar Sverrisson and Ida Holten Worsøe of Jo Strømgren Kompani huddled together in a box representing a journey on a train, two pilgrims on a arduous journey to an unknown destination. These are the snapshot images still under my skin, imprinted on my brain.

2015 Fringe Festival, Sept. 3 - 19, <http://fringearts.com/all-presentations/festival-guide-online/>

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