

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Subcircle

Hold Still While We Try to Figure This Out Together

by Kirsten Kaschock

FringeArts hosted several thINKing DANCE writers and guests (see list in the right-hand sidebar) last weekend to watch the highly improvised show *Hold Still While I Figure This Out* as created and performed by Subcircle (featuring Niki Cousineau, Christy Lee, and Scott McPheeters, with live sound design by Jorge Cousineau). After a post-performance discussion, we were left with some questions and thoughts which we offer up now—

Alternate titles:

- Our Pleasures So Transient
- “maybe they should smile more”
- Our Internal Lives—a Rummage Sale
- Press Scan and Listen to Thirty Seconds of Every. Single. Thing. (KK)

A stage set with racks of second-hand clothing. Furniture cluttered throughout the space making me me feel both at home and in a wider world of possibility. Floor lamps with warm lighting creating shadows on the walls. The performers—two women and one man—arrive without fanfare, without costume, and without any indication that they are performers. They talk quietly among themselves, choosing from among the many images laid along the edge of the stage. One is selected, pinned to the wall: a prompt for an improvised practice. And so it begins. Costumes are selected from the racks. Movement begun. Sound is recorded and then looped. Decisions are made. (AR)

This is the height of trendiness—to be present both as performers and body, to draw back the curtain, so-to-speak, and it comes with many references and meanings. But it is unclear how this reflects on the larger performance. (JF)

There is a ladder. There is a picnic blanket (or it is a bed sheet, or shame cloth). There are tiny chairs hung from hooks that bob in the air along with a tulle cloud like a nightmare. The dancers walk in unison. They wear hats. Sometimes they have fun with each other, talking on stage and I wish for more of that. I wish to be in rehearsal, sitting on the stage, saying things like they say into the mike. Things like “That’s not going to work.” “Don’t interact.” “Be less specific.” (KK)

I wonder how these performers are relating to one another. Is one a reflection of the other’s past? Is another a reflection of the joy of performance? I stop seeing them as performers. They are just people now, vulnerable and present in their full selves, moving before us—repeating and repeating, layering and layering, as if in a dream punctuated only by the nostalgia of songs I’ve heard a thousand times. (AR)

A woman sits on a chair. With a viola player’s posture, she twists and wracks her wrists, expressing a mix of artistry and anxiety. She could be sewing, one hand pulling thread away from the other. Then the hands move towards her body, her gut, her breast, her throat, which roll with them. In isolated moments like this one, individual performers are able to draw me in. (JF)

Hold Still While I Figure This Out exposes its own process, inviting the viewer to ask what it means to do this work. What does it mean for the performers to create it? What does it mean for me to watch it, to judge it, to accept it? It points away from the performance itself and points, instead, to me as the viewer and to the world around me, making me conscious of what really is—the chaos, the decisions, the struggle, the attempts. The dance is not on display. The meaning of why we make dance is. (AR)

I think I’m tired of pieces that put me inside the deciding mind. I’m tired of seeing it laid bare only to find that the structures dancers absorb in early training do, in fact, work for an audience: unison, commitment to eye contact and focus, repetition in different contexts—especially a concept brought back much later like a punch line: when so many props litter the stage, the return to one of them can seem a marvel, or a relief. A seemingly arbitrary diagram of task and emotion-zones was handed out to the audience at the beginning of the show; it served to reinforce the feeling that this was a game I was watching, not playing, and thus the stakes were low for me. (KK)

To *Figure It Out* I want to be in the Subcircle basement, living amongst these objects. I could pull-chain into performance mode and investigate histories in the space above my head. Would it be possible to unearth nostalgia for events before my time? Amidst the messes that artists are forever making to clean up again and again, part discovery and part delight? (AD)

Potential tag-lines:

- Jinxed meets Dick Clark meets Kasey Kasem meets Martha Quinn. They trip through France.
- Lynch returns, 2017. Intriguing, going nowhere in s l o w m o t i o n.
- Pop-up shop performance.
- Hoisting thrones, dangling veils, balancing ladders.
- A red dress is always a good choice.

The Beach Boys burrow deep, somewhere near that spot Scott McPheeters’ trembling, itching, fidgeting thumb is going for. (CM)

Contributing writers: AR – Aseel Rasheed, AD – Anna Drozdowski, JF – Julius Ferraro, KK – Kirsten Kaschock, CM – Carolyn Merritt

Hold Still While I Figure This Out, Subcircle, November 16-18, <http://fringearts.com/event/hold-still-figure-3/>

By Kirsten Kaschock

December 1, 2017