

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Adriano Shaplin

Deliciously Considered

by Thomas Choinacky

Upon arrival at *Perfect Day*, I—with the tiny audience of three others—am ushered up to the second floor of Headlong Studios. We are asked to leave our cell phones at the door and offered slippers to replace our shoes. I feel a release, an excitement as I let go.

As a former manager of Headlong Dance Theater for four years (2011–2015), I am familiar with this site. I was here as they produced intimate, experiential performances, from a visit to a stranger's house in *This Town is a Mystery* to a sensory walk-through of capitalism in *W*Im*rt Nature Trail*. I typed away for countless hours in the second-floor living room of this old funeral home-turned-office. It always felt plain and dirty with its white walls and crumbling brick fireplace dropping dust. Welcomed into this same office, I am awestruck; nothing is recognizable from my past.

With sooty fireplace gone, it is a spotless lounge with leafy, green wallpaper and big, cushy seats. I feel I have been invited to a fancy dinner party as a guest of honor. Nikki Delhomme's design gleefully imparts coziness and surprise throughout the experience. I soften into the comfortable seat. A disembodied voice requests the audience to put on eye masks. This feels like a giant step as I'm still orienting myself to this new world, but I trust the kind voice, one of numerous sensorial experiences offered. The narration initiates me, now blind, into the first waking moments of a "perfect day."

What does it mean for everything to be "perfect"? It is a potent term: idealism and flawlessness become considerations. *Perfect Day* honors optimism and rightness. I become aware of my own presence as the narration notes each move, decision, and idea flowing out as idyllic. Here the glass is always half full, and shared with the audience.

"Dozens of snake plants oxygenate the interior of your house as murky blue light begins to creep in through the skylights." Adriano Shaplin's text is dense and vivid. I am inside a contemporary epic. Without my sight, I can concentrate on the beautiful, complex layers

and rhythm. Anita Holland, Amy Smith, and Shaplin perform vocal gymnastics with each detailed descriptor, elaborately unfolding the grounds of a mansion and its garden. I can practically feel the soft silks, the temperature of my ass against the toilets, the sound of the rain they describe. This sensorial permission guides me throughout the show: nothing forced, everything intentional.

Later, my blindfold removed, the flamboyant design and precise movement layer back onto this world. The chorus of three performers metamorphose with the design. Fluidly embodying this unhurried, careful world, they are completely themselves and also one unified entity. As I sink further into my seat, I indulge in the wine I brought, feeling part of the entity they create. Together we read the newspaper, go for a run, and have sex—sometimes suggested with merely two extended arms. A Faberge-esque egg is nestled in an armpit and two performers butt-bump each other—each task evocative and simple, yet imaginatively choreographed to highlight the humor of the thick language. As this day floats forward I might become overwhelmed by the cacophony of visuals and sounds, but director Rebecca Wright impeccably shapes the multiplicity of layers to avoid sensory overload.

We engage in the wonders of sex, partnership, and shitting. Perfection is self-care. Perfection is presence in the here and now. Perfection is sovereignty, separation from everyday societal problems. Time works differently here. Wright arranges intimate moment-to-momentness emerging without pressure, supporting my contentment. There seems to be no wrong way to see this world.

Perfect Day is unlike anything I have seen or experienced before. It works like something analog, like animated illustrations weaving together text, image, and body. It also fits right into Headlong's wheelhouse, placing their audience in the middle of their performative experiments (as in *Cell*, *Explanatorium*, [This Town is A Mystery](#), or [The Quiet Circus](#)). Here they fashion my mood with flowery scents, luscious audience seating, and the opportunity to cozily indulge myself for an hour or so—a spectacular feat, charmingly done. I leave abuzz, my muscles reconsidering how I move through the world. How can I continue to manifest my own pleasures and indulgences?

[Perfect Day](#), Headlong Dance Theater, Headlong Studios, October 21 - December 19

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