

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Brian Mengini

Fringe Festival Picks: Independently Produced Dance

by Kat J. Sullivan

Despite the fact that the Fringe Festival is often the busiest time for some of Philadelphia's dance community, the wide variety of dance performances over the three weeks in September gets sparse press coverage. Often, the dance performances that do get some media buzz are those of FringeArts' curated artists; the shows are fully produced, get the lion's share of real estate in the informative *Guide*, and the artists are often not Philly-based. That's not to say the performances are not deserving of the coverage! Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker returns to our city this year and I always enjoy her work. And, after participating in a creation phase of this year's large-scale dance piece, *Úmbal*, I'm excited to see the final product. Yet, I can't help but feel that Philadelphia's independent dance artists deserve some more love. In an effort to shed light on our city's talent, I offer my picks from the Philly Fringe Festival's independently produced dance shows:

1. [Ancestral Movements](#) – Breanna Moore

One of few dance selections in this year's Digital Fringe, Moore is tracing dance forms of the African diaspora from the contemporary back to the enslaved. Not much information is given about this piece, but I am curious to see how this material, so full of the weight of human experience, will manifest on the Internet.

2. [SplitScreen](#) – Tree.Lock//Productions

Meg Kirchhoff and Sterling Melcher say this production was developed during Philly's 2018 [SoLow Fest](#), so I'm optimistic about some old-fashioned Fringe boundary-pushing goodness here. This multimedia show incorporates theater, dance, and video, and if you're so inclined (or geographically located) they're bringing the show to Minneapolis after Fringe as well.

3. [bilialien](#) – Annie Wilson

Wilson is a staple for Philly dance weirdness. Her latest work, performed in conjunction with Nichole Canuso's [Sneakers](#) and caboose-d by *Yesterday's Garbage* (this open mic might be exactly what you think it is), promises a thematic catalogue of uncomfortable-sounding words. The Tuesday, Sept 10, performance at 1pm should be delightfully dissonant.

4. [RE:figuring](#) – Leslie Elkins/foursomeperformance

Fringe dance this year seems to have a penchant for vague descriptions and titles that start with "RE:," and yet, I'm drawn in by the promise of "improvisation" and, dare I admit, "props." Foursomeperformance originated their 2007 *American Trilogy: The Pursuit of Happiness/What's Your Problem?* at Fringe, and though it sounds like this year will veer away from overt political commentary, I'm interested to see what it holds.

5. [You Are Not a Shining Star](#) – UMA Presents: Mark "Metal" Wong and Vince Johnson

I love a self-aware performance, and I love that Wong and Johnson let you know right off the bat that their dance duet is "weird but not boring." And, even though I haven't yet made it to the studio myself, I love what [Urban Movement Arts](#), the Afro diasporic and American folk studio that is producing/supporting this show, brings to Philly's dance community. If this catches your eye, check out [Fire in the Sky](#) : an expansion of their Artist-in-Residency program, directed by studio co-founder Lily Kind.

6. [The Destination is the Downbeat](#) – Take It Away Dance

Pamela Hetherington, artistic director and choreographer for Take It Away Dance, has been serving up quality tap in the Philly area with her company since 2014. In collaboration with music director Erica Corbo, this show looks at the ever-shifting landscape that is rhythm and time in jazz music and how tap dance might play into it, or off it.

7. [RE: SHE, a litany of adventures](#) – the after-image

the after-image identifies themselves as a theater company, though they cite "movement" as a central force used to conjure up their postmodern works. To my knowledge, this is the only Fringe dance show to feature a differently-abled artist in their production image. Plus, they provide ASL interpretation at their Friday, September 20 performance and have accessible seating available at all.

8. [RISE: Relationship is Self Existing](#) – Asimina Chremos & Leah Stein Dance Company

One of this year's LOVE Park performances, Philly dance pillars Chremos and Stein are collaborating to create an improvised work that engages with those who are witnessing (no small feat) and illuminates the compositional elements that are undoubtedly already present. It's always interesting to see how artists utilize the [oft-heckled](#) park, and I trust Chremos and Stein to set something sensitive in motion.

9. [La Bolivianita](#) – Elba Hevia y Vaca/Pasión y Arte

Hevia y Vaca is a treasure to Philadelphia arts. Her breadth of experience and artistry put Philly on the map as a hub for flamenco in the United States. This autobiographical solo evokes her journey as a Bolivian immigrant, mother, and flamenco dancer. Go, and be prepared to want to sign up for one of the classes at Pasión y Arte immediately following.

10. [Dumpster Dance for Garbage People](#) – Prudence Anne Amsden

Curiously, this performance (see photo above) from a recent Temple MFA dance graduate is not listed under dance but instead "interdisciplinary." Whatever it may be, I'd say we could all learn from anything described as "a bizarre fever dream of aggressive camp

dance.” It’s not a Fringe Festival without a healthy dose of self-deprecation; if you also identify as a [dumpster fire](#) (as Amsden does in her bio), this is the place to feed those flames.

[Philadelphia Fringe Festival](#), September 5–22.

By Kat J. Sullivan

August 20, 2019