

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Sam Post Creative

Lessons in Child's Play

by Carolyn Merritt

Eight bounding valentines in pink and red mini-skirts, maroon and pink tops, white capri tights. The all-female cast of Kalila Kingsford Smith's* *I Spy, With My Little Eye* are pastel confections that float and suspend, slide and rebound, circling and swooping with their arms, tracing ideas in the air. They clap in unison. Race in time. Roll on their backs, legs piked overhead. Sprint Red-Rover style straight into a human chain, delight in suspended penchées upon their capture. They sit in a criss-cross applesauce circle and execute an arm-phrase race. They loop and weave a DNA sequence with thier hands, wrap arms around chests tight, pointer fingers tracing the night sky overhead. It ends with a clap, the last to finish edged out each time as the remaining dancers spin on their bottoms and tighten the circle. Repeating faster and faster, they work to a frenzy, smiles and giggles at each victory and defeat. Play for its own sake, it is everything in the moment, erased in an instant like your name on the beach washed clean by a wave.

Kingsford Smith enters and follows one dancer at a time, the play in movement a lesson in listening, getting it down in the moment, committing to action. She turns her gaze to us and mimics our postures, fidgets and shifts as she locks eyes. Her smile is a wink and a question: do you see me seeing you? She improvises and shares personal details: the baby in her family and a September birthday, she was always the youngest, at home and at school. Always in the position of following. She recounts an early attempt to lead and its quick dissolution, her first failure as a leader. Her decision to "go back to following along."

A time of life when play is work, childhood holds lessons worth remembering. To see children play is to understand the balance between structure and whimsy, to grasp the stakes of a game as a concept. But children are not always so sweet, so good natured in the face of failure.

After the show, we sing “Happy Birthday” to Kalila and share the cake her mom baked from scratch. The sugar lingers in my mouth as I savor this rose-colored romp, even as I yearn for just a bit more story, other flavors of movement to temper this sweet treat.

[I Spy, With My Little Eye](#), Kalila Kingsford Smith Dance, 2019 Fringe Festival, Mascher Space, September 12-15.

* Kalila Kingsford Smith is a writer and editor for thINKingDANCE.

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