

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Maddie Rabin

Not a Ballet, but a Labor of Love

by Miryam Coppersmith

Down the cracked and narrow sidewalk of Grays Ave, up a flight of graffitied stairs, and past a table of homemade cookies for sale lies the low-budget dreamworld of *Sprout: A Full-Length Not-A-Ballet*. I feel instantly comforted by an atmosphere that includes homemade fake flowers strewn across the space, a warm lamp light, and the sweet sounds of a band led by the honey-voiced Addie Herbert.

Sprout tells the story of a young plant who loses one of her leaves and treks far and wide to find herself. The child-friendly tale—told in dance, music, and the storybook narration of Dawn Pratson—is an allegory for the journey of finding oneself as a young adult. The choreography is peppered with cleverness, including a cheeky Argentine tango nod in the midst of a group party, and a slow dance between the sprout and its accordion lover (played by an ensemble member with an accordion strapped to their back). The sprout embraces the other dancer, wrapping its arms around them to play the accordion as they dance. Aside from these clever moments, I long for more progression in the choreography. Even as the sprout takes on a life-changing journey, the dance remains within the same genre and its mood is light, lyrical, and delicate.

The music, sets, and costumes carry the production. The mostly silent sprout breaks out into song halfway through the show, singing to its lover as it leaves. Maddie Rabin, who choreographed the piece and dances as the sprout, has an expressive, folksy voice that cuts deep. Pratson as the narrator is another highlight of the production, from her careful kindergarten-teacher vocal tone to her adorable flowered hat and suspenders. The show radiates with the love and care that the cast and crew have poured into it—love that encompasses the audience. As the sprout finally starts to blossom, audience members with flowers strapped to their wrists and ankles rise from their seats and lie down on the stage to make a meadow of flowers, bringing new meaning to the term “audience plants.”

In their final song, the cast urges us to transcend the chains of shame that bind us and blossom in our own lives. The message fortifies me as I exit the comforting space to the complex not-a-ballet of my own life.

[Sprout: A Full-Length Not-A-Ballet](#), Maddie Rabin, Panorama, 2019 Fringe Festival, September 12-15.

By Miryam Coppersmith
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