

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Logan Gabriel Schulman and Benjamin Behrend

Welcome to the Shiva House, Where Grief Is in Full Bloom

by Darcy Grabenstein

It was fitting that I participated in *Welcome to the Shiva House* on September 11. In this “Zoom theater” production, Benjamin Behrend and Logan Gabriel Schulman invite you to a *shiva*, the seven-day period of mourning traditional Jews observe following the death of a family member. Being Jewish is not required; the emotions explored—sadness, denial, anger—are universal.

Schulman began by mourning Sam Bloom, aka “Pop-Pop.” We all lit candles, just as Jews light a memorial candle during *shiva*. He again mourned Sam Bloom, this time using the name to represent a young woman friend who had moved to Israel. We did a responsive reading, using the companion reader provided digitally. We tore a piece of cloth or paper, just as Jews tear their clothes as a sign of mourning. He then mourned Sam Bloom, the name now signifying his father who died of cancer. Schulman recited *kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for those in mourning. We were asked to say the names of those we’d lost in the past year; I uttered the names of two COVID victims I knew.

It was *bashert* (Yiddish for “fate”) that I reviewed *Welcome to the Shiva House*. After the Zoom portion ended, participants were instructed to continue with an immersive audio experience. We walked outside, mimicking a Jewish tradition that ends *shiva*: walking around the block and returning home, symbolizing one’s return to normal life after the mourning period. I stopped in my tracks as the haunting melody, one of my all-time favorites, played through my headphones. It was a version of [“La Rose Enflorece,”](#) a haunting Ladino (Judaeo-Spanish) melody that means “The Rose Flowers.”

I stopped in my tracks once again. Blowing in the gusty ocean breeze was a supersized American flag, flying half-mast to honor those who died in on this date in 2001. That’s when the tears came. I wondered whether others were having similar experiences as they strolled around their own neighborhoods. During the Zoom portion, I had glanced at the faces in the gallery, looking for tear-filled eyes. I saw pensive, sad expressions, and I wondered whether we would have been freer with our emotions if we had been sitting in the safety

of a darkened theater.

Each of us in the audience today did our own delicate dance, teetering between letting go, fully grieving, and holding back our emotions.

[Welcome to the Shiva House](#), Benjamin Behrend and Logan Gabriel Schulman, 2020 Fringe Festival, Sept. 10 – 27.

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