

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Steve Surgalski

Be Stoked, My Shaking Heart

by Mara Flamm

Heartshakes is a primordial passion primer on stoking a beating heart into sensual aliveness. Shannon Murphy, choreographer, along with seven dancers*, each with their own unique pulsing presence, move us through an hour-long dance meditation of quietly haunting and exuberant improvisational and synchronized choreographic phrases.

Shades of oranges, reds, and purples—bloody carnal colors, with bursts of yellow, like sparks of electricity—casually adorn and connect the dancers. Large blue and red sculptural masks, wide eyed with full-lipped open mouths, are characters on the stage and later become part of the playfully seductive choreography. The masks, and other provocative materials used throughout *Heartshakes* suggests that the dancers are creating a primal kind of myth, the masks totems to an awakening of communal erotic energy.

In the beginning, the dancers pace, slowly and rhythmically, sensing each other like cats before deciding to pounce or play. They create a slow gravitational pull towards each other's vibrations, like babies noticing each other's presence in a womb. Beau Hancock bursts their amniotic bubble with a gorgeous solo improvisation. In its balletic and contemporary sexiness, Hancock offers the dancers a Puckish mischievous and alluring invitation to embrace, connect, and rejoice in the only thing: the sensual body.

This sets the stage for *Heartshakes*' power: resist (a refrain spoken in the haunting and atmospheric sound design by Steve Surgalski and kira shina) a body disconnected to its own sensuality and resist not showing or sharing that erotic heart. After moments of penetrative watching, tense and tender gestures of touch, and push/pull of suspension and support, the dancers celebrate vibrant synchronicity through full-bodied group choreography. These moments act as a physical and spiritual release—contemporary dance's form of a baptist church really feeling it. I feel a sense of joy, vigor, and powerful grace in these close sweaty bodies dancing the same communally charged phrases while also celebrating the dancers' individual fiery viscerality.

Heartshakes shows us what's on the other side of authentic seeing, touching, and moving with others: communion with our soulful and erotic cores—a call for our hearts to not just beat, but to shake with passionate aliveness.

*These dancers are: Brandon Graf, Beau Hancock, Maris, mik phillips, Kayla Ricketts, Michele Tantoco, and Sara Yassky.

[Heartshakes](#), Shannon Murphy, Icebox Project Space, Cannonball Festival, Philly Fringe Festival, Sept 1, 7, 17.

By Mara Flamm

September 6, 2023