

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Haven & Hazard

Football, roses, and don't forget the cake

by Charly Santagado

To Be Danced, a mixed bill curated by Nathan Forster of [ReFrame Dance Theatre](#), brought together a distinct blend of nostalgia, rigor, and unadulterated fun for all ages. Three riotous ReFrame performances were juxtaposed with more somber works that led viewers through a wide range of emotional terrains.

Power Play, choreographed by [Marissa Aucoin](#) in collaboration with Forster, opened the show. The choreographers were also the performers, and they “worked out” to an old-school sportscast recording. Donning black knee pads and yellow shorts under bright lighting, they flew across the space, passing a football, celebrating their victories, and mocking each other’s hyperbolic celebratory dances to the sound of triumphant music. Speed drills were punctuated with classical modern dance positions, and the audience tittered at their subtle facial expressions, playfully antagonistic eye contact, and innovative athletic lifts. Tracks like “All I Do Is Win” by DJ Khaled and “Maniac” by Sargent Fury took the dancers through elaborate jumping jack patterns, and reminded me that dance is the only fun cardio.

The mood changed drastically when [Manatsu Tanaka](#), choreographer and performer of *Rose from the Cerebral Cortex*, slowly entered with a string of glowing white roses wrapped around their head. Clad in black, you could hardly see their body against the backdrop. Their head quivered minutely, and they slid back and forth to breaths in the sound score, electronic music by [Dietevil](#) intensifying as they unwrapped the rose lights beat by beat. When they removed their oversized blazer, they exploded into strenuous dancing, long dark ponytail whipping as they threw themselves into and out of the floor. The music stopped, and they were breathless. As the lights faded, they dramatically folded a crumpled paper into an origami paper crane, perhaps a nod to the traditional Japanese belief in the good fortune generated by folding 1,000 paper cranes—a first step on a long path toward a better future.

Based on the audience's audible laughter and my own frabjous experience, *Posts From Nowhere*, choreographed and performed by

Forster with live original music by [Jason McCue](#), stole the show. McCue inaugurated the piece with a wholehearted strum while a crop-topped Forster in red-heart-sunglasses shuffled in on his toes from offstage. He narrated: “Dear Void, it’s my golden year.” Split into sections by a series of cunningly crafted letters with just the right balance between wit and spontaneity, the protagonist, who called himself Andrew, took us through his journey from “city boy” to North Dakota rustic. Whimsical stories of cat funerals and his geriatric neighbor’s line of elderly suitors were complemented by air quotes, leg flicks, and writing gestures, the movement often translating his voice and the guitar dancing between it. At times, the choreography and music came into perfect alignment—three fists against the floor mapped to three plunks of the guitar—and when McCue and Forster hopped in unison, McCue could hardly keep up (in a fun way). The piece ended with a robust dance solo; his glasses off, we saw Andrew’s inner beauty light up his face for the first time.

In Which We Find Ourselves, a piece by [NewBrese Dance](#), was a well-executed non-narrative sequence of floorwork and vigorous partnering that used momentum and weight sharing to move energy across the space. After an extended duet between two of the dancers to sentimental instrumental music, the third entered the mix. Despite the performance’s skillful flow and well-rehearsed unison, I was left wondering what animated the dancers’ ever-shifting points of connection to one another. Their distinctive matching half-bun/half-braid hairstyle added to the abstruseness of the piece.

CAKE, choreographed and performed in matching mini-shorts by [Michelle Lukach](#) and Forster, closed the evening with a sugar rush. The dancers daintily rolled out a cake on a small cart, and Forster placed plastic cupcakes around the space to the backtrack of a cooking show. Lukach badmouthed cake via tongue-in-cheek monologue, but her disdain didn’t last long. She started dancing along with her speech, and Forster joined her in both dance and dialogue. They imitated whisks, balanced cupcakes creatively, and delivered self-referential jokes; this effortless interplay of spoken and embodied meaning was the piece’s biggest strength. After a hilariously prolonged hand sanitizing stare off, they iced the cake and sang happy birthday. Then, Mozart’s “Requiem in D Minor ‘Lacrimosa’” played as they iced each other, seamlessly caking themselves through choreography that didn’t appear to go out of its way to make a mess, but made one nonetheless. (I was reminded of [Mozart: Birthday, by Jiri Kylian](#)—one of my favorites.) Cake crumbs sprang and cascaded off their bodies, the audience cackled, and I was filled with that warm fuzzy human feeling.

To Be Danced, mixed bill, [mignolo arts center](#), Oct. 13-14, 2023

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