

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Wide Eyed Studios

I'm an Artist, but I'm Fun!

by Miryam Coppersmith

Adam Kerbel bursts onto the bare stage with a dance somehow both precise and thrown-together—quick little grapevine steps, high kicks across the stage, full-out eye contact—as the Old Hollywood soundtrack blares, falters, blares again, restarts. He falls and recovers with each glitch but can't quite get the timing right for the next combo.

Throughout *Dead Muse*, Adam's solo performance, he struggles against the sights and sounds of Los Angeles. A magical encounter with his supposedly dead grandma (a chance to ask all the questions he never got to!) happens across a crowded LA thoroughfare. Adam shouts "I thought you were dead" across the screeching traffic. An intimate first date is also an audition. Adam starts with a "slate," stating his name, age, weight, and ethnicity ("ethnically ambiguous"), before being coached on how to deliver a line about the oysters at the restaurant.

Through it all, Adam draws us into his life with a personal touch that compels me to write about him on a first-name basis. Every location, situation, and object, down to each cigarette smoked, is realized purely through Adam's skillful physicality (no props or costumes until the bitter end), an evocative yet minimal soundtrack, and mood-conjuring lighting. All these elements come together to create an impressively dynamic show with only one performer.

But Adam is never truly alone on stage. In vulnerable moments, he might turn to us in the audience. After a heartrendingly bad audition, he finds he doesn't have a light for his precious cigarette break. He scans the crowd with a hint of need in his eyes until one of us pulls a hand out of their pocket and shields an invisible flame. Adam leans towards them coyly to let the fire catch.

He might get to chatting with you, and the next thing you know you're dancing with Adam at the club with a whole group of us surrounding you while the strobe lights pulse. These moments of turning to us in need might become maudlin in the hands of another

performer. The whole genre of autobiographical solo performance might be teetering on the edge of overdone, but Adam brings his entire creative force to bear on his own experiences. *Dead Muse* is not just an hour of him “telling us his story.” It’s diving into the sensations of life with him: images, sounds, movements, and emotions overlapping, layering, interrupting each other to envelope an LAness a Museness an Adam Kerbelness that is not afraid to be witnessed, to be seen, and to be with us.

[Dead Muse](#), Icebox Project Space Gallery, Cannonball Festival, September 8, 15 2024.

Image Description: Bathed in purple light, Adam Kerbel leans to one side with arms spread, a gold fringe flying from his shoulders as if he just landed a jump. His face is hidden by shadow and a large brown fedora.

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