

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Maya Jackson

In endings, beginnings; in presence, healing

by Ellen Miller

Speaking into the mic propped in front of them, marisa illingworth jokes that the stool they perch on is wobblier than expected. Illingworth's show alternates between monologues and movement practice; the latter, they explain, is how they are practicing presence.

authentic grief baby monologue is born out of many things, but none more centric to the piece than the loss of their mother. Their movement practice is a project to cope with their PTSD from caregiving. As they dance, illingworth focuses on movement that feels good in the moment, which helps them stay present. They aren't trying to make the dance be anything; "it just is."

In one of the movement sections, they slice their arms from above one shoulder to the front of the room; later in this section, they round both arms, one hand pointed towards the ceiling and one towards the floor, making a curved shape, before slowly rotating both arms so that their hands are in the opposite directions.

The show is touching, funny, crushing, and painfully intimate. We laugh with illingworth as they recount how they haven't performed since college – well, except for a five year relationship with a man. Doesn't that deserve a round of applause? (We, of course, applaud loudly).

Illingworth removes their sweater, revealing a glittery blue crop top. They apply lipstick and pull on a cheap, long blue wig. "I need a hero!" they lip-sync, rhythmically thrusting one hip forward to the beat of the music. Towards the end of the song they break into maniacal laughter. They kneel, their arms outstretched, and the lighting dims to cool blue, mirroring the grief they are feeling.

Illingworth returns to the front of the stage, picks up a piece of paper, and begins to read. "I lost her," they say over and over as they recount the last days of their mother's life, doctor appointments, phone calls, caregiving, and pain. "I lost her when," "I lost her," "I lost

her.”

As “Always on My Mind” plays, illingworth raises a hand slowly in front of their face. They begin to move in a circle, unhurriedly rotating, as their other arm comes up as if they are holding someone, dancing together.

The courage illingworth shows in sharing their grief and mourning process is powerful and gripping. Upon leaving the theater, I immediately sent off a quick text message: " Love you, Mom.”

[authentic grief baby monologue](#), Icebox Project Space Gallery, Fringe Festival 2024, September 14-22, 2024.

Home page image description: A blurred image of a body in motion and in the air. The body is wrapped in a white fabric (potentially a bathrobe) and bent in a V-shape as if falling onto the bed beneath. Tossed fabrics above them are brown, baby blue, grey, and white - possibly other clothes. The bed is made but rumpled and evokes a hotel room.

Article image description: The performer, marisa illingworth, sits on the floor in a straddle with their body facing the camera. They are wearing a white crop top and navy sweat pants and have bare feet. A coffee cup sits in between their legs, white with a black lid, anonymous. Tattoos are visible on their arms. They look down and away from the camera. Behind them is photography lighting equipment; one of the lights is lit, putting the performer in the spotlight.

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September 17, 2024