

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Nikki Weems

Just wait. It will become something new.

by Megan Mizanty

Ten minutes into this performance, a few things are clear: Zoe Farnsworth is an earnest, kind, welcoming soul. After all, every audience member is gladly obliging to sing with her, and we become the live playlist to Zoe's movement: slow, swirling turns on the balls of her dainty feet around a table of two lit candles and a photo of her Bubby (grandmother), Lillian Kriegel.

Projected on the wall are four photos of Lillian, taken decades ago, including one holding Zoe as a baby. Lillian's smile radiates and cuts through time.

In [*The Meaning of Where I'm From*](#), Zoe asks "how do you develop a relationship with a ghost?" After her grandmother's passing, Zoe discovered her memoir, revealing a barrage of memories and experiences, ranging from terrible to heartwarming. Excerpts of Lillian's extraordinary life are read aloud and projected high above us. Lillian Kriegel was born in 1924. She weighed less than three pounds. Her family immigrated from the borders of Poland and Russia. She endured a horrendous hip surgery as a child, rendering her cast-bound for nine months. As these traits are read, Farnsworth embodies the words: rushing and running across the stage, mimicking carrying and lifting, sweeping her arms and throwing a white shawl around and above her.

The projections switch to Zoe's disembodied legs in a white silk slip, imagining and embodying the rigidity her grandmother felt post-surgery. As the performance continues, I wonder: if Lillian was in the audience, how would she respond? Here is her life, her photographs, her words, her painful and wonderful memories, broken down and transformed into something new. Like compost. Zoe has her own fascination with transformation and 'compostable dance' - exploring the hows and whys of a person's origin story. At one point, Zoe reads her own "No, but where are you really from?" response, and enthusiastically recounts her childhood across Brooklyn, summer vacations in Maine, and a love of play, play, play as a child. Her Jewish identity is a centerpiece, as well as reckoning with gender, white supremacy, and decolonization in the present.

The ritual ends with an invitation: would the audience like to join her on stage, and sing once again? Would we like to think of our own pasts, of our own difficult times losing someone? Oh my, an arrow to the heart. Once more, we all oblige, and our voices - the sounds of strangers, all in our own places of loss - intermingle and echo in the space. I will be honest: it was unexpected. It was lovely. The lights darken above us, only left with the starlike twinkles - the lights we have left of our ancestors.

[*The Meaning of Where I'm From*](#), Zoe Farnsworth, Icebox Project Space Gallery, Sept. 1-20.

Image Description: A white female dancer moves in a bright green pasture, framed by a vibrant blue sky. Some trees and housing are behind her in the distance. Around her, an abstract circle frames her as she leans over her shoulder, with arms floating out to the side. Within this frame she appears fragments, with fingers and palms floating detached from her body.

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