

# thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Laney Powers

## **This is Your Moment**

**by Sophiann Moore**

Striking silhouettes in a semicircle against a background of warm sunrise. It's as if we've been transported back to the 70s and invited to the first gathering of the summer. They flow in beautiful unison with every jump and circular arm movement executed on stage. Smiling through their rotating grapevine, the performers set the tone for this electrifying show, featuring UMAMI's first evening length performance, *The Sweetest Encounter*, and UMA Street Dance Theater's debut, *S.O.L.A.R.I.S.*, at Fringe Arts. This split bill performance showcased their expanding community's artistic prowess and unwavering dedication to their craft.

In UMAMI's *Sweetest Encounter*, each section had its own way of welcoming us into the world they created. In a promotional video, UMAMI's director and choreographer, Rylee Locker, shared, "We're going on a little deep dive into concepts surrounding love and what love looks like, maybe in your life." This theme was evident throughout their performance. One piece that grasped the intimacy and vulnerability of love was a work with dancers paired into nine partnerings. Each of their encounters was filled with warm embraces. The movements gave a sense of reminiscing as the dancers melted into the floor underneath them. Dancers sent their heads side to side, then swooped up and over with their arms to land on their knees, facing away from us. Then their heads rebound, creating a slow melting arch of the back that takes them to the ground. They advance through each movement seamlessly with either the fan of a leg extension or the subtle strike of a hand in the air. It was beautiful to witness such control and the moments of gentle exhale within this artwork.

Urban Movement Arts Street Dance Theatre's *S.O.L.A.R.I.S.* creatively pushed the boundaries of commercial dance. As the lights came up on their first piece, one dancer moved backward toward the audience in slow motion, and a group of dancers performed fast, hard-hitting jacks on the other side of the stage. The soloist seems to be in a sort of dream state with their movement while surrounded by the heart pounding bass and House grooves of the other performers. Later in the piece, each performer has a chance to display their artistry in a solo while others are still entangled in the groove, and they do not disappoint. The choreography was a phenomenal merge

of House, African, and Waacking technique that oozed a grounded, soulful energy from beginning to end.

The duet between Chloe Marie and Monica Hill felt like a release as if they were shaking off whatever had become too heavy to bear. They came together to then spiral away into their own universes of staccato arm movements, hitting every angle. Within this whirlwind of agile movements, they found pockets to gingerly slow down and live in their bodies, even for a moment. The duet swiftly runs back upstage to begin a series of floorwork that plays with level changes in release falls, swiping illusions, and head lifts. They meet one last time in the center upstage to face each other before being sent head first, running backward and off stage. I perceived it as a reminder to have more moments of pause and really take time to relish wherever we are at because life moves so quickly.

A drag and multimedia inspired piece performed by Monica Hill started with her coming out in a futuristic outfit and moving through the audience, making them a part of the piece. She strutted her way through them and back to the stage. Her movement would take her from reaching to the sky to spinning into a swift death drop, landing right beside a pile of clothes. Monica shared that her piece was inspired by Rina Sawayama's XS video and 2020 album. Through her piece, she wanted to bring up a conversation around capitalism, consumer culture, environmentalism, and Black Queer advocacy. It reminds me of the ongoing issues around fast fashion and how it pollutes the environment by piling up in different locations like the beaches in Ghana (AP News article).

UMAMI's finishing piece was filled with high energy and everyone dressed in colorful garments. Downstage, you saw signs with 10s across the floor as performers played with the rhythm on every hit, fan of the leg, and death drop. Rylee created a ballroom scene to honor the culture that influenced her craft, the collective entralling the audience, who screamed for more. The piece ended with a soloist in a final striking movement, their arms hitting out to the side as they sat back into their left hip while everyone around them ended in a death drop. I'm thrilled to see what more is in store for these collectives as they continue to evolve and break new ground.

*Sweetest Encounter* and *S.O.L.A.R.I.S.*, UMAMI Collective and [Urban Movement Arts Dance Theater](#), Fringe Arts, Jan 11, 2025

Homepage Image Description: *The image features dancers from The UMAMI Collective's Sweetest Encounter, wearing various colorful 70s vibe clothing. The ensemble poses with all hands up to the sky and flares outward while they look up. It is set against a warm sunrise background, the dancers radiant happiness through their inviting smiles and open chest to the sky as if soaking in the sun.*

Article Page Image Description: *The image features a group of dancers from Urban Movement Arts Street Dance Theater's S.O.L.A.R.I.S., wearing different varieties of all-black attire. Set against a black cyc background with blue and purple lights hitting the dance floor, the ensemble is caught in mid-motion as they spin and transition into their next phrase.*

By Sophiann Mahalia Moore

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