

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

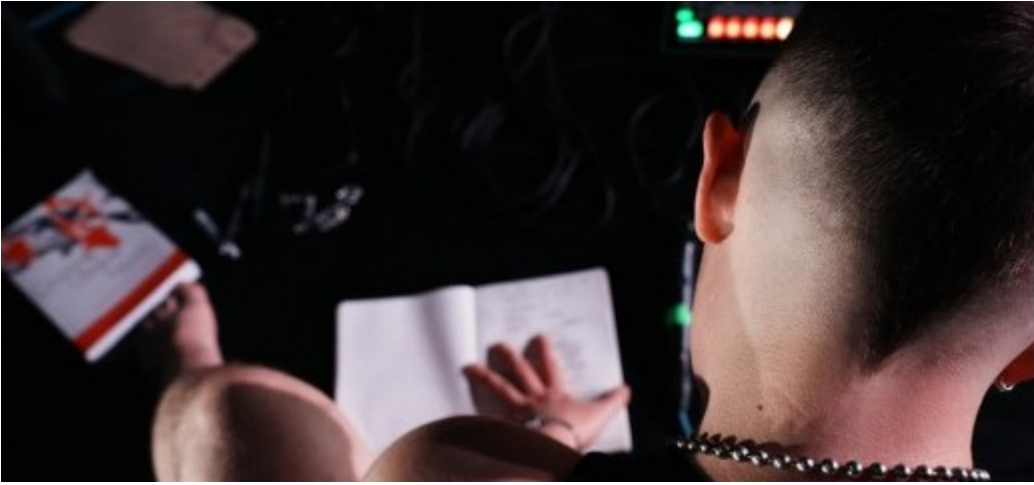


Photo: Ofentse Kwenaita

When the Muzzle Comes Off, Who Do You Bite?

by Rachel DeForrest Repinz

Hi, I'm Portia, says Portia Wells (they/he) as they emerge from the quiet glow of TV screens and DJ mixers. Their voice cracks. They try again:

Hi, I'm Portia.

They clear their throat, trying once more:

Hi, I'm Portia... Sorry, I don't know why my voice did that...

Wells's new solo work, *When the Muzzle Comes Off, Who Do You Bite First?*, presented in the [2025 Estrogenius Festival](#), feels like both a final chapter and a new beginning. This is Wells's third year on the producing and creative team of the annual NYC festival, celebrating the work of femme, non-binary, non-conforming, and trans womxn artists.

I first encountered Wells's work when we shared a bill at the 2023 Estrogenius Festival. Since then, we've become colleagues, friends, and creative peers. Their work is consistently vulnerable, tender, and charming; this latest offering deepens these sensibilities with multiplied intensity. *When the Muzzle Comes Off* feels like a re-introduction to Wells, outfitted with the same alluring charisma and authenticity, but this time with daring certainty.

This solo is from the gut. The blare of pulsing dance music, snarling dogs, and a distorted microphone builds a soundscape that is messy, chaotic, and unguarded. As a performer, Wells brings an unmistakable relentlessness, effortlessly moving between quotidian gesture and luscious phrase work, offering intimate reflections on their trans non-binary transition along the way.

I enter the small black box theater of Downtown Arts to Whitney Houston's iconic music video, "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" playing on a boxy 2000s-style TV. As lights dim and screens go black, Wells emerges atop a DJ mixer, softly lit by the glow of the illuminated control panel.

A pulsing beat partly built from the sounds of overlapping dog barks swells as Wells unfurls. They rip themselves through the space, tugging on their silver chain necklace. Continuously collapsing in on themselves, they are relentless in their endurance to rebuild themselves again, and again.

Wells moves between playful flirtation and a tender hesitation, at times looking to the audience for reassurance, confidence growing as they continue in their (re)introduction. *Hi, I'm Portia.* They morph into a bodybuilder, flexing muscles and reflecting the flashing images on the TVs behind them. *I'm wondering how much you want to know.* Flex, twist, contract, curl.

Through several outfit changes performed in front of the audience, Wells is not afraid to morph into different versions of themselves, inviting us to spectate in the moments of transformation. In one moment, they fling themselves through the space in neon green running sneakers; the next they strut and chassé as the "Rhinestone Cowboy," complete with a bedazzled denim matching set and jazzy phrase work. Wells moves effortlessly between these versions of themselves, without shying away from revealing the messy moments.

Sorry to interrupt... Wells eventually pulls the plug on their own dance party. They leave us with a departing confession, reading directly from their journal into an echo-y microphone. They imagine a future where everyone can dig deeper, where the collective "we" can move past the *limit to this conscious honesty*. A future where Wells finds their *bark*, their *bite*, and most importantly, one where they're *still alive*.

When the Muzzle Comes Off feels like less of a return than a rebirth – Wells emerges with full command of their voice, even if it cracks a little bit.

When the Muzzle Comes Off, Who Do You Bite First?, [Estrogenius Festival](#), Downtown Arts, May 24.

Homepage Image Description: *Portia, a white trans non-binary person, crouches over a mix of DJ mixer, wires, and opened journals strewn across the floor. They wear a black tank top and athletic shorts, and focus in on a laptop. The glow from the laptop and other technical elements subtly illuminate Portia.*

Article Page Image Description: *From behind, Portia is crouched over a mix of journals, books, electrical wires, and DJ mixers. The back of their silver chain necklace glistens in the subtle lighting.*

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