

# thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Cameron Kincheloe

## That Fringeworthy Kind of Love

by Lauren Berlin

Tell me about the first time you fell madly, head-over-heels in love—the kind that lifted you, possessed you, transformed you, and then wrecked you. I don't like to remember the slings and arrows of that can't-eat, can't-sleep kind of infatuation, but [Laila J. Franklin](#) and the cast of [BABYBABYBABY](#) bring us there.

Set in the heart of a former 19th-century horse stable—now the charming, intimate [Performance Garage](#)—[BABYBABYBABY](#) is a love letter to romance in all its messy, glorious extremes. The historic venue is the perfect setting for a tragicomedy about real love.

The choreography ebbs and flows—evolves, or perhaps intentionally devolves. The opening is all alchemy and air: bodies in flight, limbs tangled in the breathless joy of new affection: Infatuation, physicalized.

I'm reminded of Shakespeare's timeless line: "*The course of true love never did run smooth*" (A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1.1.134)—a perfect way to sum up the emotional highs and lows the dancers bring to life in *BABY*.

Duets become scenes—mini love stories told through movement and sounds: Duets emerge, *carrying, supporting, holding, dropping, pushing, shoving, leaning, pulling, hovering, prancing, ponying, sobbing*. The voices of Nina Simone, Barbra Streisand, Aretha Franklin, and Leonard Cohen flood the space—the flutter, the fallout, the foolishness.

One scene revolves around coffee grounds left in the sink. Petty? *Absolutely*. Painfully real? *Even more so*. Another scene, a heated squabble about composting. Nothing says "forever" like bickering over biodegradable waste.

As in all great stories, however, we are reminded that conflict is inevitable.

Much of the movement has a deliberate, pedestrian quality—gestures pulled from real life, from kitchen fights to bedroom make-ups, and lifts echoing the theatrical flair of *So You Think You Can Dance*. Then suddenly, lovers are bickering, wrestling, slamming into each other like rams in mating season. It's messy, raw, and weirdly accurate—the physical absurdity of intimacy. This is what happens when we let lovers in.

*BABYBABYBABY* knows nothing gold can stay.

In one solo, Franklin hurls herself open-armed toward the air—only to fall flat onstage. Then again. And again. She's singing, too. It's painful to watch, but that's the point. We dive into love, hoping to be caught—and often are not.

[Marissa Molinar](#), enraptured by the throes of love, crumples under the weight of heartbreak—while the rest of the ensemble joyfully performs *The Pony* around her. The juxtaposition is cruel and hilariously genius. Molinar dances as if grief and bliss are indistinguishable, while the world around her doesn't stop to notice. They rarely do.

Ultimately, *BABY* is a celebration. Of love's ridiculousness, its resilience, and its ability to knock us sideways and lift us up, often in the same breath. There are bruises—emotional, metaphorical—but also glory (*Tissues, anyone?*).

[BABYBABYBABY](#), Philadelphia Fringe Festival 2025, Performance Garage, September 13.

Homepage Image Description: *The ensemble erupts into explosive movement—some in deep lunges, others mid-air—surrounded by brilliant bursts of blue, yellow, orange, pink, and red light that flood the space.*

Article Page Image Description: *Laila Franklin (director and choreographer), Michael Figueroa, Jenna Gross, Marissa Molinar, Andrea Muñiz, Sarah Pacheco, Sasha Peterson, and Marcel Santiago Marcelino stand clustered together on stage.*

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