

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Erin Pitts

Dancing When Everybody's Watching

by Whitney Weinstein

On her [website](#) Caitlin Weigel introduces herself as a quirky, hard-working comedian who has been improvising since 2010. Sketch shows, Philly Improv Theater, puppeteering, independent projects: she does it all! But this week, she's added choreography to the list with her entry into Five Dollar Comedy Week, *Just Dance*.

She presented herself as Miss Sherry, the evening's recital director, clad in a leopard-print fur coat. She was over-the-top, and dreadfully serious. "This first song is so important to me because..." I was on the edge of my seat, ready to take note of a life-changing revelation regarding the work. "...it is sung by Christian Bale." If you thought songs from *Chicago* the musical could only feature jazz moves or that classical ballet could only be executed in pointe shoes, think again.

In the second piece, a group of men played the parts of 40+ recent divorcees, aged by their long gray hair (bald on top) and Ben Franklin style glasses. When Britney Spears's *Womanizer* began to blare through the sound system, they shook and shimmied through different formations, many dramatically lip-synching through the entire song. Later these men stripped to jean shorts and brightly colored toe socks during *All That Abs*, a workout that resembled an in-class conditioning exercise I taught my modern dance students. They lay on their backs, opening, closing, lowering, and raising their legs, working so hard that even I was breaking a sweat.

Another section by the fictional "Best Friends Club" was a bootylicious affair. With deadpan expressions and short tutus, the female dancers quickly transitioned from a series of tendus and pliés to a sequence of playful butt slaps.

During the show, I watched the company jump with poor technique, forget movements, and chug liquor and beer. That's when I wondered if these dancers had even rehearsed together more than twice. I honestly couldn't tell who, if anyone, had dance experience. I could tell, however, that every cast member was having fun and taking this overblown show earnestly.

They took everything so seriously, even when it was completely absurd. They were drinking then stepping right back into line with an honest look of pride and victory before continuing the movement. I eventually felt like I was getting a genuine look into a certain kind of life, how some individuals struggle to make it through the serious parts with humor or by throwing caution to the wind.

Just Dance was about having fun, the cast functioning in their bodies—trained or not—and using them to express. Weigel rationalized at the start of the show, "What's the point in dancing if no one is watching?"

This was a celebration of the human form in all its awkwardness. It seemed to me a study of how different people access their bodies for different purposes. Regardless of age, gender, sobriety, or artistic training, our bodies are instruments through which we express our minds, communicate with others, and endure and enjoy life.

The final act, to the tune of *Tiny Dancer*, was a mashup of a messy fraternity party, a flash mob, and the closing bows in a gaudy recital. Miss Sherry's company filled the stage, inviting daring audience members to join them. One by one, each performer, from both cast and audience, stepped downstage to lead the group in movement. Some spun, others hopped, and eventually individuals paired for tango-like dips. It was slow, fast, gestural, extravagant, and candid. As the six-minute song progressed, the audience was exposed to the singularity of each mind and body. We saw how these bodies moved not only within their own repertoire, but also how they adapted to performing others' movements. Together they created a world of strange and unique movements, fueled by empathy and appreciation. Let's toast to that with a beer and a butt slap!

Just Dance, Plays & Players Theatre, March 28, www.fivedollarcomedyweek.com

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