

EbnFloh

Dance Company

PRESENTS

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de Montréal**

IN- WARD



*"Spicey's work is Hip-Hop
in real-time; stretched out,
unprocessed and raw."*

ebnfloh.com

© Melika Dez

PRESS REVIEW / REVUE DE PRESSE

2022

Istvan Dugalin

Theatre Reviewer



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Posted by [istvandugalin](#) on December 4, 2022

Istvan Reviews ► IN-WARD — Ebnflöh Dance Company

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Photo by Melika Dez Photography

Presented by [DanceWorks](#) at [Harbourfront Centre](#)

As we take our seats, the performance is already underway. Six dancers, in identical white track suits, vibe to music in their own little worlds. Some even occupy audience seats, forging a casual intimacy that will be vital later on. This is our introduction to [In-Ward](#), created by [Alexandra ‘Spicey’ Landé](#) and her [Ebnflöh Dance Company](#).

Throughout the performance, a blend of hip hop and contemporary dance, the performers will come together and break apart into pockets of communal interaction. They are never entirely on the same page at the same time, the sense of solidarity or alienation is always in flux. No mood, shared or isolated, lasts long.

A wide variety of psychological states are represented. Moments of joyful play turn suddenly sour. Individuals seek each other out, then shrink from contact. The push and pull of interaction is exhilarating. The choreography is a collaborative, partially improvised spectacle. Bodies shudder and spasm, expand and retract.

There is a fluid, dynamic fluctuation between representational tableau and abstract distillations of vaguely relatable, human phenomenon. People get trapped in clothes, awkwardly fumbling their way through a familiar process made suddenly alien. Sometimes a shirt can seem so weird; our arms and legs, usually so reliable, suddenly cumbersome and unruly.

The dancers explicit awareness of the audience allows for a sense of communal experience, obscuring the line between spectator and performer. They make direct eye contact, engaging us, even inviting someone to join an amorphous game while hilariously chanting “sports.”

It can get dark too, with some vast and oppressive existential burden creeping at the edges of their interactions. Covering in spotlights, hands raised in surrender; then dropping, hands bound in mimed restraint—we catch harrowing glimpses of police aggression.

The set is minimal, disjointed and intriguing—a tossed pair of shoes hanging on a line, a string of light bars, a large overhead lamp, a bench. Hip hop beats predominate, though a variety of styles figure into the eclectic musicality of the soundscape.

Overall, this imaginative work feels urgent, immersive and resonant.

[In-Ward](#)
ran December 1 and 2, 2022
@ [Harbourfront Centre Theatre](#) (231 Queens Quay West)
currently touring, [see schedule](#)
run time: 60 minutes (no intermission)

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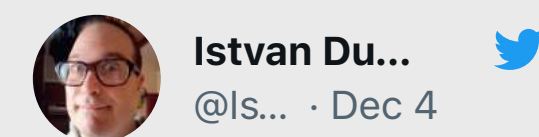


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An exhilarating blend of hip hop and contemporary dance; this imaginative work feels urgent, immersive and resonant.
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News

In-Ward

16 08 2022

In-Ward

Assembly Roxy, Aug 16-17

by Gareth K Vile

In the highly competitive marketplace of the Edinburgh Fringe, physical theatre and dance has established a firm presence, and *In-Ward* is a strong example of the rise of intelligent hip-hop dance. With an ensemble dressed in white, Ebnfloh stretch the movement vocabulary of breaking, locking and popping across the structure of contemporary choreography, approaching a butoh-like abstraction of bodies contorted, flowing and jolting in space. From an introduction that establishes the energy and virtuosity of space, the company offers a series of episodes that suggest the stresses and pressures of modern life.

The most striking elements of *In-Ward* are when the ensemble work as a unit: individuals break away, making variations on the theme and evoking the anxiety of an age of business and city struggle. Various smooth and angular, the choreography is emotive and allusive rather than explicit, the narrative never settling but reflecting the rush of commuting, group dynamics and the desperate fight for space and freedom. Like a series of tableaux, the scenarios flow together, offering an overwhelming and impressive showcase for a company of disciplined dancers and a choreography that is both precise and abstract. Never settling, the piece is a work that demonstrates how the implicit and the ambiguous can attain a visceral immediacy through visual theatre.

Claiming *In-Ward* as puppetry may seem like a stretch: the dancers come from a specific choreographic discipline. And yet both in terms of the subject matter and the movement, critical approaches from puppetry are helpful. The press of the bodies in confined areas of the stage, the depiction of contemporary life as a controlled experience, with the urgency of business or friendships shaping the performers. The human body is suddenly at the mercy of manipulation, and the particular choreography of jolt and response renders the bodies puppet-like and uncanny. The story told by Ebnfloh is the puppetry of everyday life, in which organic physical takes on the animated quality of the marionette.



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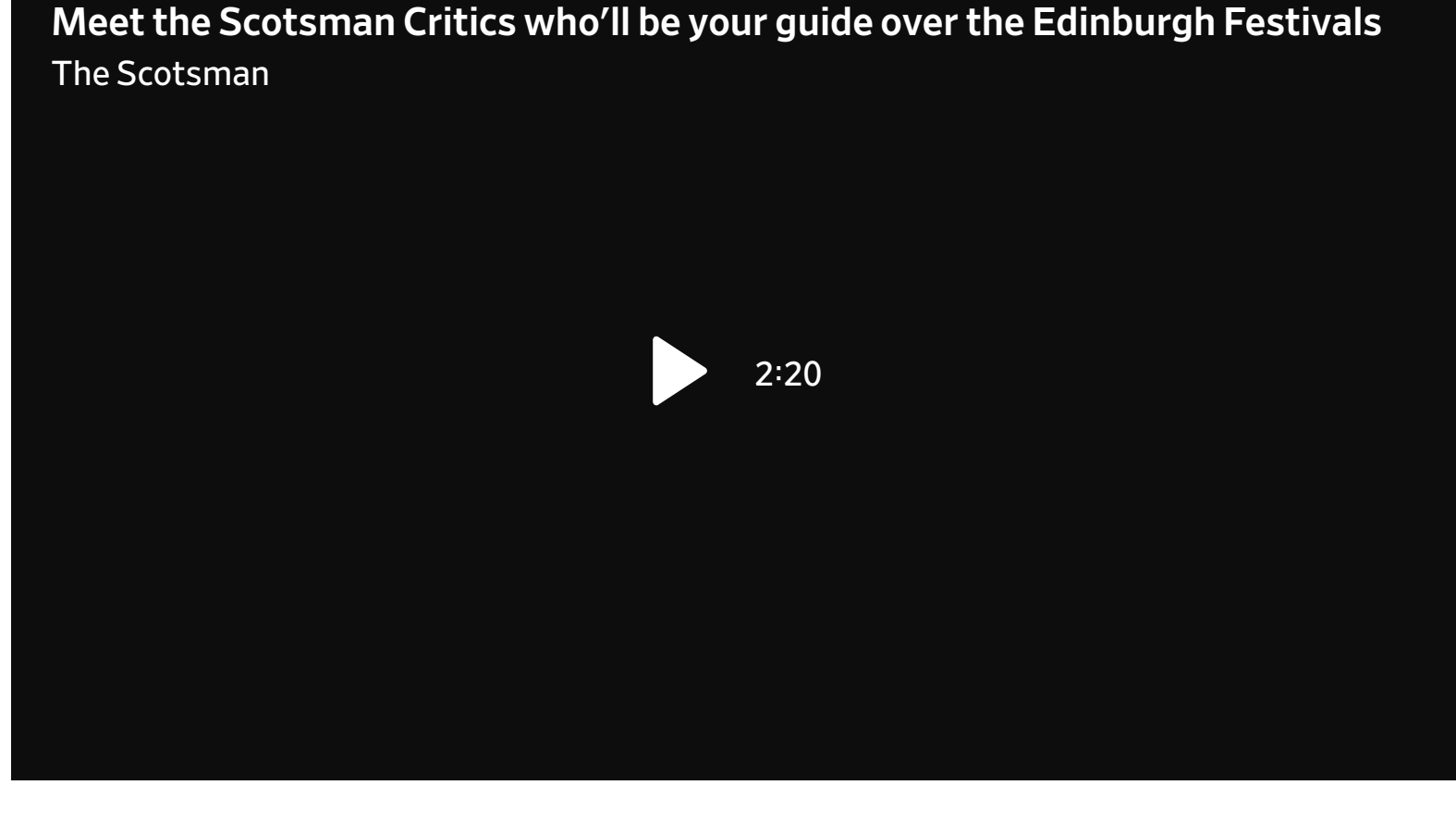
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Arts and Culture > Edinburgh Festivals

Edinburgh Festival Fringe dance reviews: Bold Moves | Beats On Pointe | We Should Be Dancing | Ballet Freedom | In-Ward

From a glorious double bill from Ballet Ireland to some less convincing bump and grind from the Freedom Ballet of Ukraine, Kelly Apter surveys Fringe dance shows

By Kelly Apter
 Monday, 8th August 2022, 3:15 pm
 Updated Monday, 8th August 2022, 8:15 pm



Bold Moves ****

Dance Base, until 14 August

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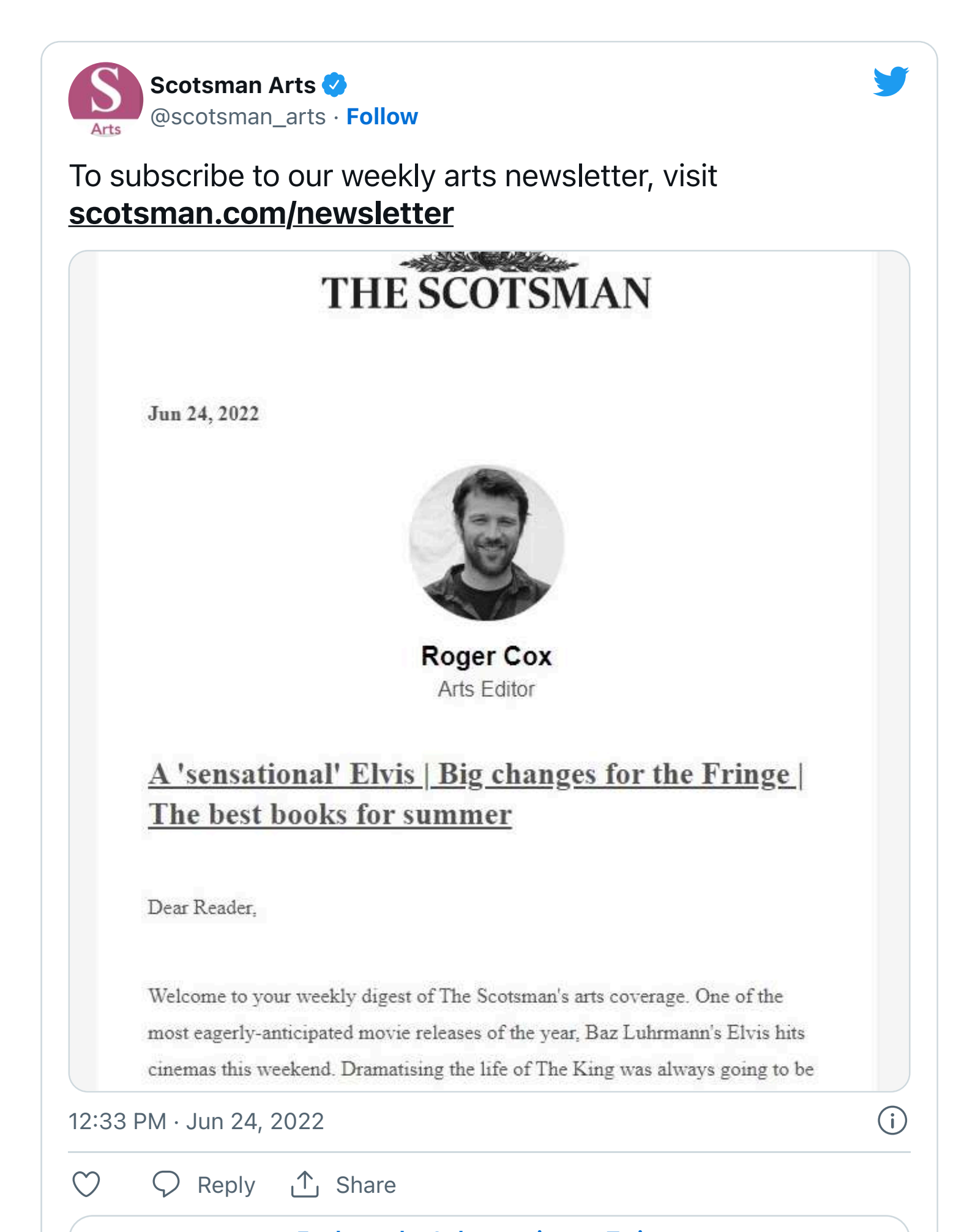
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Don't be misled by the title – compared to some of the more avant-garde works on display at Dance Base this August, Ballet Ireland's show is positively mainstream. A glorious double bill that brings classical ballet up close and personal, Bold Moves combines the work of two female choreographers, each at differing stages in their careers. Performed by seven top-notch dancers, who combine strong technical ability with a real sense of individuality, their works couldn't be more emotionally opposed.

Most Popular



US by Zoë Ashe-Browne explores the connections artists make when they are away from home. The dynamic shifts as they attempt friendliness but are pushed away, then bond close relationships that help them through the toughest of times. Unafraid to pull on the heartstrings, Ashe-Browne includes a delicate storyline of loss that rallies the whole group around a bereaved couple. While her musical choices, featuring the likes of Max Richter and Ólafur Arnalds, also serve to keep our hearts engaged.

By complete contrast, seasoned choreographer Marguerite Donlon has us smiling with ease during Strokes through the Tail. Set to, and inspired by, Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G minor, the piece is both dapper and edgy with dancers dressed in tailcoats but wearing nothing but pants underneath. Each one of Mozart's notes is embraced with grace and energy, the dancers spinning, jumping and striding across the stage like music in motion.

Swapping the tails for tutus, there are shades of Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake, but this is a work that basks in its own glory. Perhaps most joyously of all, the dancers look as if they're having as much fun performing it as we are watching it.

Beats On Pointe ****



Assembly Hall, until 28 August

Sometimes dance breaks boundaries, sometimes it delves deep into your soul or makes a political statement. Other times, as with Beats on Pointe, it simply impresses, entertains and leaves it at that. Nothing this show has to offer goes beneath the surface, but it's executed with such fantastic skill, passion and energy that you can't help falling in love with it.

The central premise is a battle between hip hop and ballet, but the line quickly blurs as everyone pitches in to create the stage equivalent of a slick music video. Movement comes thick and fast without missing a beat as this likeable Australian troupe blasts its way through a jukebox of chart hits from the past three decades. Oldies but goodies from Chaka Khan, Michael Jackson and Run-DMC rub shoulders with more modern tracks, but no song or routine overstates its welcome. In fact quite the opposite: most tunes last less than a minute.

A mix of street dance, commercial, ballet and contemporary, with a bit of beatboxing, body percussion, head-spinning and gymnastics thrown in, it's a hotchpotch of styles that keeps the crowd revved up throughout. Each new routine arrives dressed in a different outfit, from everyday streetwear to tutus laced with luminous lights and sequin-encrusted pointe shoes.

In a show with no shortage of entertaining moments, special shout out goes to a clever sequence where the show's resident breakdancer spins on his head surrounded by pirouetting ballerinas. And a nifty bit of moonwalking en pointe set to Billie Jean.

The show opens with a short speech about how much the performers love to dance, how it's not just a job but central to their very being. Everything you see on stage during Beats On Pointe testifies to that.

We Should Be Dancing **

Dance Base, until 14 August

Some truly fascinating research has gone into this dance-theatre piece from Belgium. There's also a salient lesson to take away about what we lose during the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Having watched pre-schoolers at play, the five dancers mimic their movements – the slow ponderings, the random runs, the sudden bursts of action. When footage of the children they studied is shown on screen, and we marry it up with what we've just witnessed on stage, the show exudes real warmth. But the repetition grows tiresome and, ultimately, the children are the stars of the show.

Ballet Freedom ***

Pleasance at EICC, until 28 August

For the first 20 minutes of this buoyant but puzzling piece of dance theatre from the Freedom Ballet of Ukraine, I attempted to find some kind of meaning. When none was forthcoming, I gave up and went along for the ride – which wasn't always smooth.

The 12 dancers are all talented performers and the set (an enormous wardrobe that doubles as a doorway, shower, vestible and handy storage space for a corpse or two) keeps on revealing new and unexpected things. A reworking of the company's earlier show, Boudoir, Ballet Freedom may not have an intelligible storyline, but it most certainly has a theme – sex. From the costumes to the simulated copulation (not all of which appeared wanted by the female characters), it's the only common thread. Ballet can be narrative or abstract, but at some point you really need to pick a team.

Understandably, and appropriately, there's a lot of good will in the room for this company, and the audience responds warmly and heartily – especially when the Ukrainian flag is unfurled at the end. But there is a definite sense that more clarity, plot and emotional connection, and less pointless bumping and grinding, would have been welcome.

In-Ward ***

Assembly Roxy, until 17 August

As human beings, we do our best to rub along with the people around us, but some situations are easier than others. The five people who share the stage in In-Ward, an atmospheric blend of hip hop and contemporary dance by Montreal-based company Ebnflöh, know all about that. The central premise here is a group of people forced to live in a confined space – and they use a myriad of devices to avoid each other, physically and emotionally, including burying themselves deep inside their bright white hoodies. The dancers wander the space, seeking solitude but finding themselves sucked into each other's energy.

Ironically, when they do come together – sitting on a bench or sharing a moment of fun – the show is elevated. Each dancer's mastery of hip hop techniques is abundantly clear, and in the brief moments of synchronised choreography, there's a real energy and tightness. There is no doubting the abilities of either the performers or choreographer Alexandra 'Spicey' Landé, but as an outside onlooker, making an emotional connection and finding a route to the inner world of these performers is a challenge.

[Dance Base](#)



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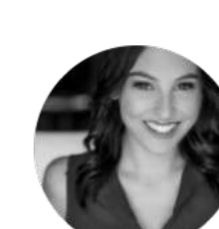
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In-Ward Explodes with Raw Force in Vancouver, Touching Deftly on Social Issues

Choreography by Quebec hip hop icon 'Spicey' exposes humanity's need for connection yet desire for independence



By Rachel Silver Maddock

PUBLISHED JUL 20, 2022

REVIEW



Ebnfløh in In-Ward / Photo by Melika Dez Photography

In-Ward ran from July 11 to 12 at the Firehall Arts Centre Theatre as part of the 2022 Dancing on the Edge festival.

The energy is infectious upon entering the theatre at Vancouver's Firehall Arts Centre for *In-Ward* by Ebnfløh Dance Company presented by Dancing on the Edge festival. The wings have been pulled back, hip hop music is pounding and six white-sweatsuit-wearing dancers are freestyling all over the room.

Members of the Montréal-based company are clearly in their element, just responding to the music – their bodies like liquid, waving and morphing, highlighting accents in the music with gestures, steps and chugs. On the risers directly to my right, Ja James 'Jigsaw' Britton Johnson stomps between stairs, arms motioning faster than seems humanly possible. The whole seat section rattles. This opening scene is a wave of energy, it's all around us and we're being baptised.

One by one, the dancers get stuck in stillness, starting with Kosisochukwu 'Kosi' Eze who freezes under an industrial spotlight downstage. With baffled expression and chests thrust upwards like baby birds, they scuttle to gather upstage, white costumes gleaming in the light. After a long, suspended pause, the bass drops and the dancers launch into a high-energy group sequence where they push, throw and catch each other, punctuated by phrases of unison.

In-Ward, which is enthralling from start to finish, shows individuals relying on each other but seeking to be alone. They desperately try to escape the group, their clothing and even the stage as outside forces affect and perplex them. With choreography grounded in street dance, the work by Quebec hip-hop icon Alexandra 'Spicey' Landé points to humanity's need for each other, but also conveys a sense of claustrophobia and desire for independence.

In a comical moment, all six dancers try to fit on a white bench onstage, pushing back and forth like crowded siblings. They look bizarrely like astronauts with white hoods draw-stringed tightly to cover most of their faces. One after another the dancers pull their hoods down as if struggling to breathe. The sense of tension (and suffocation) builds until Johnson launches into an explosive krumping sequence that forces the rest into stillness – touring the stage and emanating power as the others melt to the ground.

These energetic highs are offset by lows, sometimes involving light-hearted exchanges – laughter, verbal banter and even an amusing game of tag between dancers and audience – and slower, more extended transitions (where the white costumes become versatile props), establishing a sense of rhythm over the hour-long performance.

Once the dancers liberate themselves from their hoodies, the work starts to touch brazenly on social issues. Like white-clad goddesses, Elie-Anne 'Rawss' Ross, Eze and Céline Richard Robichon circle the stage with halting steps, arms held wide in ultra-slow voguing. The trio builds into a true celebration of feminine energy (eliciting woops from the audience) until, at the climax, Ross takes centre stage with hands framing her lower abdomen, chin tilted upwards with an expression of disbelief.

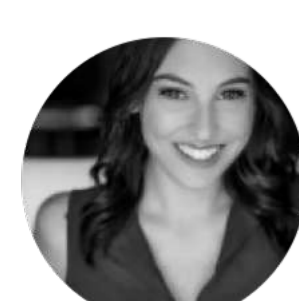
In that moment, it's like all the air is sucked out of the room with the blatant reference to the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* south of the border. After such a stunning display of female power, the concept of women losing autonomy over their bodies is so outlandish that Ross' stunned face seems like the only apt response (to drive the point home, her expression lasts for the remainder of the show).

Later, when siren-like sounds overlay the music, a playful vignette involving Eze, Johnson, Jaleesa 'Tealeaf' Coligny and James-Lee 'Kiddy' Joseph drastically dissolves: the Black performers back away in slow-motion towards stage left, arms slowly gathering behind them in mock-handcuffs. This provocative, striking scene under red flashing lights is then superseded by a final sequence that unabashedly celebrates Black culture, involving all the dancers and ending the work on a high.

The performers in *In-Wards* show exceptional range, and Landé's work carries enough force to deftly land on real social issues. Needless to say, Vancouver gave a standing ovation.

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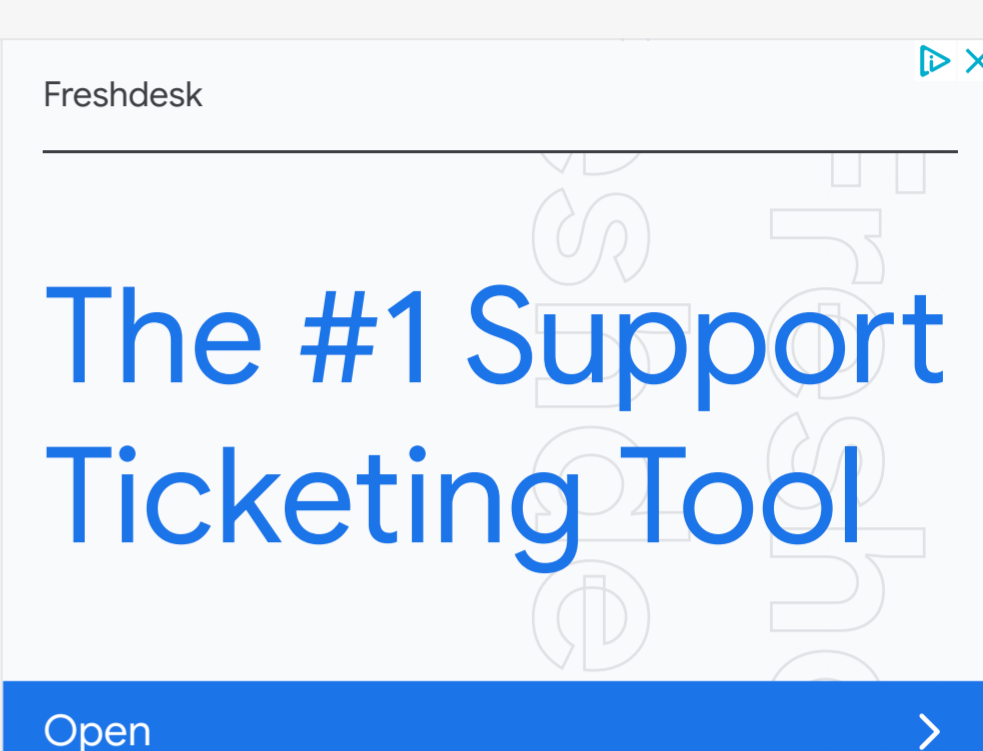
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By Rachel Silver Maddock

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July 12, 2022 · DANCE, FESTS

Dance review: Ebnflöh's In-Ward brings the thrill of the streets to Dancing on the Edge fest

The cutting edge of hip-hop meets Montreal company's fluid vision of confinement

BY JANET SMITH



In-Ward. Photo by Melika Dez

Dancing on the Edge presents Ebnflöh's *In-Ward* at the Firehall Arts Centre until July 12

FROM ITS BIG trap bass beats to its krump slouching and chest pops, *In-Ward*, from Montreal's Ebnflöh Dance Company, is rooted firmly in the streets. Making few concessions to contemporary dance, the striking vision from choreographer Alexandra "Spicey" Landé is riveting and raw over its full, fluid hour.

All of this makes *In-Ward* one of the most exciting and refreshingly uncompromising shows at this year's Dancing on the Edge Festival.

Your attention never ebbs and flows—as proven by a small audience who made a big noise when it leaped to its feet in a standing O at the end of the opening show.

Credit goes to Landé's alternately dark and darkly funny concept of six bodies trapped, *No Exit* style, in a room. Some of the flowing vignettes find the dancers zombified and caught in a surreal limbo, others have them exploding in rage one minute and teasing each other playfully the next. Props also go to the six fierce performers (Ja James "Jigsaw" Britton Johnson, Jaleesa "Tealeaf" Coligny, Kosisochukwu "Kosi" Eze, James-Lee "Kiddy" Joseph, Elie-Anne "Rawss" Ross, and Céline Richard-Robichon) who commit fully to the piece's mood—and dance themselves into the ground in the process.

Audience members are immediately immersed with the dancers, entering the theatre to discover the beats already banging, and the performers already popping, not just on the stage, but up the stairs, and in selected seats, where they remain for the entire first section.

The dancers look like urban ghosts in all-white sweats and sneakers as they move towards the stripped-to-its-bones black stage; a big industrial light, a central bench, and a pair of kicks thrown over a wire are the only set pieces.

Throughout the show, the performers creatively turn their hoodies into props: at one point they yank them over their faces to eerie effect; in another, a mass of dancers pulls at each others' sweats till they all fall backward, erupting across the floor.

Rather than work the mélange of hip-hop styles into synchronized dance numbers, Landé lets each artist find their own groove to create moods and sculptural imagery. One sequence finds the dancers leaning hard backwards as they move around, as if pushed by some invisible force. And watch what each performer brings to the off-the-hook movement: the popping by Rawss gets so refined at one point that she's trembling violently all over; Jigsaw flips a playful rap into something primal and angry, and his moves extend electrically, right out to the tips of his expressive fingers.

There's meaning here too: people fighting for space, lost in the crowd, grasping for hope, and climbing the walls.

In-Ward is intense, it's laugh-out-loud funny, and it's badass—hip-hop that's not watered-down and allows the dancers to find their own flow in a context outside of the streets or clubs. But let's not over-analyze it: head to the Firehall tonight to experience it. Just follow the sub-bass beats. [S](#)



Photo by Vanessa Fortin



Janet Smith

Janet Smith is an award-winning arts journalist who has spent more than two decades immersed in Vancouver's stage, screen, design, and gallery scenes. She sits on the Vancouver Film Critics' Circle.

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