

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Christina Gesualdi

No Pukey Love Stories... (crowd-sourced responses from nine 25-40 yr. old Philly dancers)

by Christina Gesualdi

We tear up, blush, dream up, Dance/UP, make up, break up, man/woman-up, screw up and, sometimes, just plain screw.

We stretch, snuggle, struggle. We embody, embrace, embellish. Crushes to crashes, sweeties to sexual desires, and on Valentine's Day – buyers, lots of them.

The experiences of love, romance, and sex are much more three-dimensional sticky-tricky than Hallmark, Tiffany's, or Whitman's could ever know.

Love. Dancing. And the in-between. It's meta, it's dense thought-matter, it's fleshy body stuff, it's heavy as guts, porous as skin, and absurd as bellybuttons.

Love

"Love is knowing when to use grace, when to be humble. Love is struggling through together and delighting on the other side."

"Love is the molecules that keep everything sticking together. But because it gets so sticky it's also complicated. It's connective tissue that sometimes needs to be repaired."

"I guess the cool thing about love is that like expressions of any deep feeling, grief being the other one that comes to mind, is that there are as many ways of experiencing it as there are sentient beings."

Dancing Life/Love Life - Mad Libs

"My dancing life parallels my love life. Fits and starts, lots of upside down and trying desperately to remain vertical, occasional falling on my head."

"My dancing life is inseparable from my love life. I have always searched for an amazingly hot girl who is a free spirited wild child on the dance floor and just KILLS it! We will spend all night dancing all over each other and then take each other home."

"My love life alternately supports and conflicts with my dancing life. Dating an artist is generally amazing: Having an intimate partner to imagine things with is so great, but then sometimes you get into tricky territory because you assume they understand the way you vision and dream, which really isn't the case."

Have you had to make sacrifices in your dancing life to deepen your love life? or vice versa? Where does marriage, starting families, and moving in together come into the picture?

"I love my messy floor. I love my little room and my oddball postcards tacked on the wall. I like inviting my 'lover-not-boyfriend' into it, and I also like when he leaves.... Sometimes, when we've shared great sex and a hearty omelet and then we part ways, it feels so very excellent."

"I like not having the responsibilities of a family and just working on my art and my career."

"We're moving in, and I have to do fewer projects because he won't let me stay up all night on the computer. But that's not even dancing. That's admin."

"This question is loaded. Marriage is a structure set up by societal conventions that works against true human will and nature. On the other hand, I might get married if someone asks me to do it... I think I want to have a kid by the time I'm 32 – I'm 28. I think about this more than having a long-term partner."

"I feel like marriage sometimes translates like this 'I really like the way things are going, actually I love the way things are going, actually I love you, and can we keep doing this till we die?' Damn, I don't know. I just want to ride the wave and see if it knocks me over...."

Now *this* is loaded: What does it mean to settle?

"Have you read [Sex at Dawn](#)? A take on tribalism and how we've come a long way, baby. The first bit talks an awful lot about monkeys, but once you get past that, it is pretty interesting."

"I secretly think that artists become lame once they have kids. Their work becomes sappy, or they just don't have the time to be rigorous. I admire any woman who makes it to menopause childless and doesn't apologize for it."

"Having a person that you love that loves you really opens the door for deep exploration but also for deep complacency."

"It's harder if you're a free spirit and a dancer. That's like the kiss of death- a 90% chance you won't be married or even settled before you're 45!"

Role Models - Who is doing the love thing just right?

"[Niki and Jorge Cousineau](#). There are many examples of artists that are married and make work together, and thus far I haven't found one that makes more sense than this sweet duo and their perfectly well adjusted and delightfully oddball children."

"I appreciate how candid and transparent [Miguel Gutierrez](#) is in his performative work and his writing... and on Facebook. He is a romantic and folds his own experiences of love, lust, and longing into his work in a real way. That part from *Everyone*, where they're all making out... yes, it made my panties drop."

My Kissing Life/My Sex Life/My Dancing Life

"Yeah, sex... Yeesh. I find the realms of sexuality and creativity to be so close together as to be virtually indistinguishable. Like: we are working together towards making a piece/having an orgasm, but the multitude of ways to get there are infinite, but I have definite preferences about how I like to get us there."

"Improvisation practice has been incredibly great for my sex life....even just kissing, I get so interested in the variety and rhythms of sensations. Many of my kissing partners have mentioned that they've never met anyone who kisses like I do... I've learned to be interested in so many sensations that erotic ones are just part of the mix."

"I think that we (the dance community) are so much more comfortable in/with bodies than any field I can imagine. Though that is mostly limited to the po-mo-hippie-contact community who is generally happy to drop trou at any moment without much pomp and circumstance. But see, now I've just gone and confused nudity with sex which is clearly an issue."

Valentine's Day

"V-day is a holiday designed to make us go out and spend money and alienate people who are single."

"I do think it's important to not take your partner for granted, and I like having an excuse to do something special with my sweetie."

"It feels so completely contrived and pressurized as to suck any possibility of romance out of it."

"Valentine's day is okay. I want to feel loved and love everyday."

"My aunt used to cut out hearts and put them in an envelope for my brothers and me to open, and they would all fall out when we opened the card. I always loved that."

I'm talking February 14, 2013 in Philadelphia. What are your plans?

"Probably try to get my single friends to come out to a bar or see a film."

"Group Motion audition? Maybe eat some Trader Joe's big pounder chocolate."

"I am teaching a free Zumba class at 2:14pm to celebrate that one billion women dancing together is a revolution and demanding an end to violence against women. And of course it's in Love Park."

Memorable messes or mush of V-Days past

"About five years ago my significant other... was trying to be very low-key and meet my 'I hate this day' vibe so invited me over for dinner and a movie. I walked into a candlelit installation that was truly incredible and changed my tune for a bit. Three hours later, I had a super-cat-allergic-explosion and we had to evacuate the apartment in the middle of the night because my eyes were so swollen shut I couldn't see. L'amour."

"I borrowed my grandma's car in Laguna Beach to drive down to LA to go to a music festival where a friend was playing. We liked each other. We had tacos somewhere, and I acquired a headband with two bobble hearts on it. We ended up making out all night in the car parked in an alley. We ended up going out for 2 years, and he turned out to be a psychologically abusive sociopath."

"A few years ago, after a pretty substantial breakup, I went to Fergie's Pub to be miserable with my ex. I think we ate some fried food and talked about our days. It actually wasn't all that terrible: grease in...tears out, they complemented each other."

The rest of your life

"I tried dating an investment banker once. He bought me dinner at Tinto. The wine was very good. He picked me up in his Audi and was playing a Dido, live-in-concert CD. He didn't believe that I liked the movie Reservoir Dogs because I was a girl. He had never heard of the Coen brothers... I left that date and went to a comedy club and watched my ex-boyfriend do a standup set as his redneck character and realized in the depths of my heart that I was doomed to love artists for the rest of my life."

So now what? A list: things I want to do after mulling over your thoughts on love:

- 1. Send a valentine to each and every person who responded to this survey. Not an e-whatever, but a real live heart shaped card made of construction paper, glue, glitter, and doilies. I secretly hope small bits of pink glitter will escape from the envelopes to find a home on the postman/woman's sleeve. When he/she sees it, I hope he smiles.**
- 2. Read and reread every Italo Calvino novel ever written... by a fireplace...somewhere in the Poconos...alone...no, with wine.**
- 3. Travel back in time. Go to ImPulsTanz 2012. And take this class: "Contact Improvisation based on Tantra"...check out the [description](#).**
- 4. Get Philly Car Share and drive back to my high school, bust into the guidance counselor's office, and say "You know, I'm really glad I didn't just minor in dance or have a 'safe plan' to fall back on." Then I'd sprint down the hall dodging clusters of fifteen-year-olds in plaid pleated skirts, bust into Ms. B's morality class, catch my breath, look her in the eyes, and say, "I'm overjoyed about the fact that I refused to complete that wedding book assignment you gave us junior year. What were you thinking?"**

You know the funny thing? I love cutting things out from magazines and I stage-manage and event-plan regularly. But at 16 I refused, and at 27 I continue to refuse, to tidy up my love life. Value systems of improvisation and performance saturate my dreams for the future. I try to experience life in the moment, disorient myself often, detach from the familiar, and replace ambition with curiosity. Shouldn't we be teaching high-schoolers this instead of grading them on cutting out Vera Wang bridesmaid dresses? If I could travel forward in time, I'd urge my potential lovers, partners, colleagues, funders, in-laws, and children to engage and explore their love lives and dancing lives...and to use this piece as a starting place.

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