

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Kat J. Sullivan

LOVE Park Through New Eyes

by Zornitsa Stoyanova

As I walk up to the newly rehabbed LOVE Park, I am greeted by nostalgia—the selfie sticks and posing tourists remind me of the time I first moved to Philadelphia. When did I forget to see my home city with the excitement of a tourist?

Water shoots freely in the air as the diversity of Philly's people, including locals, people experiencing homelessness, and internationals alike, alternate amongst the benches and chairs to enjoy the LOVE. Today I am here for *RISE: Relationship is Self-Existing*, an outdoor community event by Leah Stein and Asimina Chremos, which is part of the Fringe Festival.

My eyes find a familiar face, then two, three, and more. I have arrived amid the cast of almost twenty local performers.* “Would you like to join?” – I am asked immediately. I decide to observe.

Leah Stein announces, “... just tune in ... and we'll start. ... I'll be right there with you ... facilitating the audience experience.” I sit at the periphery of the fountain and am offered a program suggesting to either watch or join by sensing the environment and being still.

The event has started.



Photo: Zornitsa Stoyanova

Some of the performers stand in stillness, some crouch in the fountain and look around. Still, but not frozen, they are all sensing. They breath deep and put hands on heart. Some touch the splashing water, but never get wet. I see these humans take in LOVE Park in a gentle overflow of senses. They walk slowly, see each other, touch, embrace. They are together, creating a living, breathing tableau of social interaction. As the fountain forces water out of the ground, their stillness and deliberate movement create a gentleness in the air and every second becomes precious and felt.

I begin to notice the pattern of the water. I notice people playing music and having a picnic, young German tourists wearing backpacks, an elderly Indian family crossing and stopping to watch or participate. I notice the city with new eyes in its majestic social vibrancy.

And I've joined.



Photo: Zornitsa Stoyanova

My entangled histories with each of these artists spread out like geometric figures throughout the park. They slowly create a circle and turn their bodies out, as if to welcome the rest of the world or simply a stranger's embrace.

A young child jets fearlessly between the towering fountains—tempting the water to wet her dress. And what I notice is surprising: When did I forget to be fearless?

* Zornitsa Stoyanova is a Philadelphia independent performance maker and many of the performers were thiNKingDANCE writers.

[RISE: Relationship is Self Existing](#), Asimina Chremos & Leah Stein Dance Company, LOVE Park, 16th Street and JFK Boulevard, Philadelphia, 2019 Fringe Festival, Sept. 14.

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