

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Dawn States

Dawn States Dancers Speak for Themselves

by Kara Nepomuceno

Image description: Three Zoom squares. In the top two are two dancers wearing black. In the bottom is a sign language interpreter signing. In the top left, one dancer is low, arms reaching. In the top right, the dancer is mirroring and also reaching.

My role in dance writing is often to mark in words what is expressed through the body; however, this description seems less necessary when the work is already beautifully narrated by the dancers themselves. This is the case in *Distance, Connection, Direction, Closeness*, Dawn States Dance Company's virtual offering at the Philadelphia Fringe Festival.

Company dancer Jamie Ray-Leonetti not only performs but also provides voiced-over audio description, carefully noting every aspect from the dancers' backgrounds to the formation of Zoom boxes on the screen. Ray-Leonetti, dancer Shannon Brooks, and ASL interpreters Gabi Cerda and Darla Hitchens of Pro-Bono ASL share equal screen space—three squares in an inverted triangle that changes formation throughout the piece.

Sometimes the dancers softly utter a word: *closeness, distance, direction, connection*. Each utterance ripples through their squares as movement, hand signs, and aural descriptions. In the first section, "Dancer Jamie reaches both arms in front of her towards the screen." She says, "Closeness." In response, "Dancer Shannon begins to twirl in their living room. Shannon leaps into the air ... shakes their head up and down."

As they close, the dancers face their laptop cameras, their hands gently warming their faces. I find my hands rising to my own, mirroring the gentle pressure of cheek to palm. "Closeness." Their work choreographs multiple ways to request and respond, abundant avenues for offering comfort and eliciting actions of care.

Distance, Connection, Direction, Closeness, Dawn States Dance Company, Fringe Festival 2021, Sep. 6 - Oct. 4.

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