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Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Johanna Austin

A Living Archive of Time: Sincerity Project #5

by Miryam Coppersmith

“Pillow!” shouts Benjamin Camp, looking like a gym teacher overseeing circuit training with a grey polo, stopwatch and clipboard.

Ben hits Alex Torra repeatedly with a big blue pillow. One of the blows thumps directly onto his neck and the audience winces in sympathy. On Ben’s cue, Alex then hustles to pick up toys, watch a child while they sleep, and attempt to stop another child from getting peanut butter all over the cast and set.

These circuits of simulated parenting open Team Sunshine Performance’s *Sincerity Project #5*, part of a 24-year project the physical theater ensemble began in 2014. Every two years, these artists attempt to bring their real lives to the stage. This year’s iteration draws on the experiences of the three parents in the cast and tells the story of director/performer Alex Torra’s desire to adopt a child.

Ben’s eight year old daughter Sydney welcomes us to this 10th anniversary show, reminding us that the project is older than she is. Sydney also opened the show for #2, but was only a few months old, so she doesn’t remember it. I remember though, that intimate scene of Ben cradling baby Sydney. The fact that I have only seen these two snapshots of Sydney’s life eight years apart makes the time in between them almost palpable. “This project is like an archive,” says Iris McCloughlan later in the show, “and what we say here enters the record.” I am struck by what it means to have an archive made of live performance. *The Sincerity Project* archive is not a cold transcript or objective video. It’s made up of the performers’ and audiences’ living experience of each show and the time in between them. Having witnessed each iteration of the project since #2 in 2016, my body’s memories and sensations of each performance have become a part of that archive.

Sincerity Project #5 is the work of thoughtful, mature performance-makers whose ties to each other through family, friendship, and collaboration run deep. These qualities save the project from becoming saccharin or self-aggrandizing. So does the smart performance

construction and the sense of play throughout. Often, while one performer speaks to us, others perform tasks in the background. The words and movement juxtapose each other in powerful ways that the production resists over-explaining. Mel Krodman runs and throws their body at a cushioned wall again and again while Iris speaks about the realities of 2024: multiple genocides happening around the world, the rise of fascism in America. These darker moments exist with the games and play; neither is any less important nor fully experienced by the cast. The play comes from the interactions between the sizable cast and the absurd reality of the tasks they set themselves. Ben throws the basket of toys again and again for folks to pick up. Alex gets grossed out wiping peanut butter off Pippa's hands. Sydney sticks her tongue out at the audience while Alex says something sweet about her. They allow themselves to be human on stage.

The central story of Alex's desire to adopt a child is allowed to stand in all its complexity, as are all of the relationships within the cast. They don't have to be explained, just as the cast members' queer identities don't need to be justified, as Iris powerfully puts it. In this vein, I appreciated the time the production took with Shavon Norris' chosen family of Danielle Currica, Marcie Mamura, and Megan Quinn, all of whom have decided not to have children. This group joined the cast for #4, as the project grappled with race openly for the first time and these two ensembles learned to trust each other. What began, from my perspective, as a somewhat clunky inclusion of these performers, has morphed into an ensemble. Shavon's now eleven year old niece Pippa, who also appeared in #4, shares the stage with Alex in a moment of deep intergenerational friendship, bonding over their shared experience of being adopted. This web of expansive relationships, built through loyalty, shared artistic work, and time (truly the central character of this project), reflects my own experience of community in Philadelphia.

At the end of the show, the circuits of familial tasks begin again. This time, the entire cast performs them together. They all pick up the toys, put on the shoes, and when Ben shouts "pillow," they lower Alex's head down onto one instead, let him rest, and go back to folding laundry.

[Sincerity Project #5 \(2024\) 10th Anniversary](#), Team Sunshine, FringeArts, Dec. 10-15.

Director and Lead Artist: Alex Torra

Ensemble: Aram Aghazarian, Benjamin Camp, Rachel Camp, Sydney Camp, Danielle Currica, Makoto Hirano, Pippa Keenan, Mel Krodman, Marcie Mamura, Iris McCloughan, Shavon Norris, Megan Quinn.

You can read our reviews of Sincerity Projects #2-4 below:

Sincerity Project #4: [Time Transforming Truth](#)

Sincerity Project #3: [Honestly Sincere](#)

Sincerity Project #2: [The Naked Truth](#)

Home Page Image Description: Aram Aghazarian leans forward onto the support of Alex Torra and five other members of the Sincerity Project cast. Aram's eyes gaze into the distance. The cast wears everyday clothes and stands in front of the bare tiled wall of FringeArts.

Article Page Image Description: Alex Torra winces as Benjamin Camp hits him on the back with a patterned pillow. Benjamin is jumping with the force of his throw, clutching a clipboard and wearing a stopwatch around his neck. Sydney Camp, Benjamin's daughter, calmly walks between a basket of toys and a pile of clothes behind them. Rachel Camp, Benjamin's sister, watches behind Sydney, a hand in

front of her mouth hiding an amused smile.

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