

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Anna Siegel

Circling with the Dybbuk

by Madeline Shuron

"Why, oh why did the soul plunge/from the utmost heights/to the lowest depths?/The seed of redemption/is contained within the fall," reassures the text projected onto the massive concrete wall across from us. The lights dim, then fade up; there, a young girl stands in her bridal white as she tells us about the souls of people who have died before their time. A candle can be snuffed out and relit, she argues, so why can't a soul?

The basis of Nell Adkins & Helen Sher's *Within the Fall* is concerned with more than just one soul, though: it's worried about two. Chonen and Leah, predestined souls slipping by each other time and time again, portrayed longingly by Sher and Adkins, respectively. Their circling - both physically and spiritually - is doubled and reflected in the ensemble cast's gestures and phrases. With backs to the audience, they triangulate and throw their weight back and forth; they fall, rock, shape, and hold; their hands encircle their heads in a static arc as they bring fist to palm. There are moments of joy and moments of dread, but Adkins and Sher make it clear: this is a love story.

Borrowing from modern and Yiddish dance traditions, the six performers throw themselves wholeheartedly into their movements and affect as they succinctly retell Jewish ethnographer S. An-sky's play, [The Dybbuk](#). As they dance between movement and text, they fill the space with stomping and clapping, repeated motifs seen in new lights again and again. The asymmetrical, relaxed, raised arms of Yiddish dance are recontextualized as characters brace their forearms against one another's in this familiar shape. The choreography particularly shines during the climax of the show: what was awkward partnering in the first duet between the two lovers becomes much more smooth and graceful, with Leah ultimately jumping and, in return, being held by Chonen.

"Everything in the world has a heart." As Adkins and Sher play out their final scene together, the lights slowly fade in on a spotlight between the two of them: circling, but never quite coming close. As one works through a repeated motif of swaying and praying, the

other tosses legs and arms, flying out of the ground and around to try to hold the praying one, but ultimately taking their place. A circling. A dance. A neverending story.

[Within the Fall](#), Icebox Project Space, Cannonball Festival,, September 5-7.

Homepage Image Description: Two bodies pressed almost into each other, fingertips grazing another's hand. In front, a dancer in a modest white shirt and long skirt glances behind her through tousled hair. A second dancer dressed in black sackcloth hovers behind her, as if readying to whisper something in her ear.

Article Image Description: Six dancers come together in a circle. Their hair and their long white skirts flare with movement as their grasped hands reach in and up, towards the center of their dancing circle.

By Madeline Shuron

September 6, 2025