

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Rose Luardo & Emmett Wilson

American Marriage Exploded

by Zoe Farnsworth

To Have and To Hold is a menagerie of vignettes that spoof and split open the sanctity of marriage and weddings. The campy off-kilter rollercoaster riot of a “performance study” is MC’d by Emmet Wilson who plays multiple characters: one who’s scared shitless of being married and another who’s researching American marriage and wedding rituals as a “scientist” from Berlin. In the tradition of queer performance, none of the characters are perfect and they frequently make mistakes, publicly and loudly. Wilson asks us questions about how marriage works, and for reassurance as a groom while drinking and smoking which he admits his bride wouldn’t appreciate. This delightfully awkward dialogue drew me in; I felt put on the spot to support and unsure of what I’d be asked next.

In one moment, a woman “from the future” dressed in scantily clad mismatched patterns enters carrying a potted plant to address her long long lost ancestors (the audience) about marriage. Our species has survived, although how our evolution and peacemaking came about is not revealed. Anytime the performer tries to speak about our survival, she drops into an open-mouthed birthing squat or talks in gibberish. She describes relationships in the future in ways that feel like slightly alien versions of queer relationships today.

The final act is an even sexier version of a [garter toss](#), and uplifts Palestinian liberation. Down on his hands and knees, Wilson takes the garter off Palestinian burlesque and drag artist Leila Delicious with his teeth as she splays her legs out and cheers. Then, with his head trapped between her legs, she twerks and body rolls to [KFC Santeria by Cain Culto and Sudan Archives](#). Rather than a ceremony representing a “freeing of the bride” for her groom to consummate the marriage, it’s spun as a celebration of the bride-to-be’s sexiness and power.

The show ends with Delicious smashing a cake with her butt; Wilson and another performer wipe it off her with an Israeli and American flag. Delicious rides the flags, literally making them “eat her ass” in an exhilarating act of defiance against the nation states. By sitting on these symbols of American and Israeli power as a Palestinian artist, she subverts their authority and accentuates her own power and

thoughts on their actions.

Though the transitions between different vignettes were sometimes meandering and confusing, the artists' inventiveness and the throughline of Wilson's "research" kept me engaged throughout. I look forward to future iterations of the piece which continue to explode traditional notions of marriage to foster queer expressions of joy and political liberation.

[To Have and To Hold](#), Circuitous Situationship, September 20-21, Headlong Dance Theater, Philadelphia Fringe

Image Description: *A bride and groom sit on white concrete barefoot with knives and lemons in front of them, feeding each other lemon wedges with a fig tree in a pot and wood fencing in the background.*

By Zoe Farnsworth

September 23, 2025