

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Steve Rogers

Draw Me In

by Miryam Coppersmith

Fringe is made for shows like *Wear and Tear*. Performed at the home of Philly Improv Theater (PIT), The Back Pack puts on a sketch comedy show unlike any I've seen. The hook: all of the performers wear backpacks made of pads of paper covered in black-and-white drawings and held together with elastic bands. Like a blown-up flip-book mixed with old-style slapstick, they change scenes by tearing off pages to reveal new drawings and embody whatever their paper shows (sometimes reluctantly). The silent performers convey story through these drawings, their bodies, facial expressions, and music. I appreciate the simplicity of the comedy relying on turns, clever associations, and reveals rather than gross-outs, innuendo, or pop culture references. Mostly. There is a Game of Thrones sketch, but if you don't want to be spoiled, you can grab a paper blindfold from Katie Kohler.

Each sketch leaves the stage strewn with paper (and sometimes confetti), prompting Pete Betcher to take out his real 3D broom disguised as a 2D rake. Cami Alys, a tree trunk drawn on her backpack, frustrates his sweeping. Playing breezy jazz, she coyly tears off paper leaves and drops them, adding to the piles to sweep up. Betcher eventually resorts to bringing out a real leaf blower. This play between 2D and 3D creates delight throughout the show, as do the dance breaks when the performers sling their backpacks over their heads and bust out their best moves. They throw themselves into these simple party dances (Delanté Keys twerks as drawings of money are thrown his way) re-energizing the show.

With the physical limitation of ripping paper to transition from one idea to the next, the performance has a refreshingly slower pace than most comedy. The performers put the audience at ease through their unhurried commitment to each idea. This year's show features more short sketches than 2018's *Drawn Out* and I did miss the ability to spend a longer time connecting to the characters. One I wanted to linger on: Betcher's blue crayon. After being discarded for some sharp colored pencils, he slumps on stage holding a pack of his companions and gazing towards a cool blue light; a silent and achingly funny soliloquy.

[Wear and Tear](#), The Back Pack, Philly Improv Theater at the Adrienne, 2019 Fringe Festival, September 5–8.

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