

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Christopher Ash

The Garden Flows in You

by Ziying Cui

Looking out the window of the West Hall from inside the historical [Arch Street Meeting House](#), I follow the guidance of a woman's soft voice in my headset. Amid the ocean-breeze sound of the background music, my gaze floats across the silent garden, embracing the calm brought by the classic red brick wall. A simple yet graceful bench and a tall tree beside it form an exquisite still-life, but I expect something alive and moving. Stretching my arm and stepping back from the window, I am surprised to find two dancers, one on each side of the staircases facing me, gently lifting their arms. I am grateful when the voice in my headphones invites me to move my arm with the dancers. Ready, I prepare to immerse my body and mind in the exploration ahead.

A site-specific performance limited to six audience members at a time, [Nichole Canuso Dance Company](#)'s 30-minute *The Garden: River's Edge* carefully prepares participants (audience members) for an artistic journey through a combination of audio, visual, and physical introduction. Guided by audio prompts and one of the eight dancers, each participant follows a distinct path to explore the historic Quaker Meeting House.

While following a dancer dressed in a black tank top and bright pink jeans to another meeting room, I realize I have become part of the performance. Chasing and responding to his joyful prances, I slowly spin and walk around him. I stretch my fingers in the air, feeling the energy from his raised hand without touching him. In that moment, I am no longer a passive observer, but a performer shaping both the dancer's experience and the space. As a dancer myself, I feel a sense of familiarity and joy. Our intimate interaction shifts to distanced observation when another dancer opens the door from outside, leaping ethereally back and forth down the long corridor. Though the door frame limits my view, the moving bodies—set against the old bench and architecture—evoke a film scene from the 1800s.

The interactive experience of *The Garden: River's Edge* is multidimensional, engaging participants' senses of listening, seeing, and moving. Towards the end of the show, the audience members also follow the audio prompt and write reflections on small pieces of moon

cards. The performance is made possible by the collaborative stage team, the dancers' playful steps, and the participants' interaction. By breaking the traditional way of experiencing dance in a theater, *The Garden: River's Edge*'s participatory nature provides audience members with a meditative adventure.

[*The Garden: River's Edge*](#), Nichole Canuso Dance Company, Arch Street Meeting House, Fringe Festival 2024, September 7, 8, 10, 15, 18, 19, 20, and 21, 2024.

Home page image description: The image shows the dancer Eun Jung Choi in a green shirt and striped pants balancing on one leg with her other leg bent and raised. She is framed by an open doorway with the outdoor setting of the Arch Street Meeting House visible behind her, including a bench and brick wall, suggesting a serene environment for the dance.

Article image description: The image shows a diverse group of people standing in a row inside a wooden bench, engaged in a canonic arm drop movement. They extend their arms forward with graceful hand gestures, focused on the action, creating a sense of unity and concentration.

By Ziyi Cui

September 12, 2024