

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Coline Irwin

Just the Basics - Lessons in Discovery

by Noel Price-Bracey

I sprint into the blackbox Louis Bluver Theatre at the Drake with zero minutes to spare. The lights dim and my rush melts away as the stage left door opens beginning [*Mon Carton/ My Cardboard Box*](#). A large packing box inches on to the stage. Selena Rook, outfitted in a navy blue jumpsuit, appears to the right of the carton. She grunts, pushes, and stomps, struggling against the weight of what's inside. The box slowly moves out of the door frame. I believe Rook's effort; she makes it obvious that the box is meant to be heavy. Giggles from the audience, composed of families with young children, meet the intentionally comedic struggle. With one magical rub of the hands, Rook's box seemingly becomes light as a feather. Suddenly, she glides it easily across the stage. Five minutes into the show and I am already transported into this world of possibility.

Rook enters a sticky battle between her hands, hair, and the packing tape covering her box. Defeating her opponents, she discovers two additional boxes hidden inside the first. She lines them up across the stage, largest to smallest, then rhythmically taps them, performing a joyful musical number. Slowly, Rook begins to pull items out of each box revealing all that she needs to perform her sleight of hand tricks one everyday item after the other.

Rook continues mystifying the audience with a single sheet of white tissue paper; it becomes her blanket, then crumples into a sound rich cloud floating on stage. Clay-colored playdough transforms into animals, influenced by the call and response between Rook and the audience. A small child sitting with a family to my right shouts out, "A giraffe! No, a peacock!" Rook raises her eyebrows, taken by the sophisticated request. She accepts the challenge, pressing in and sculpting out wide feathers and a pointed nose. Rook loses her grip on the peacock. Splat. The bird mushes into the floor.

Rook retrieves the playdough. I blink as she exchanges it for a small bouncing ball, then a balloon. All objects are the same clay color. The swaps happen quickly each time so that the new item seems to be molded from the original clump of playdough. The illusion is

masterful. Once again, I'm a believer in Rook's world.

Like a child at play, Rook leaves room for chance throughout the show, skillfully responding to the audience's participation, or lack thereof, in real time. She has had plenty of practice cultivating this fast recovery model— Rook originally mapped out *Mon Carton / My Cardboard Box* during an artistic residency in France prior to her return to the states three years ago. This work lives not only on the proscenium stage but in communities, engaging families in Philadelphia's public libraries and schools. Rook created *Mon Carton* as a platform to “foster and nurture imagination with everyday items.” Her work is a reminder of the necessity of creative education in a climate that is committed to devaluing and undermining the work of educational performance. *Mon Carton* runs until September 28th and is truly a delightful experience for all ages.

[*Mon Carton / My Cardboard Box*](#), Philadelphia Fringe Festival 2025, The Louis Bluver Theatre at the Drake, September 6, 2025 - September 28, 2025

Article Page Image Description: *Two feet dangle in the air attached to a person wearing a blue jumpsuit. The person is upside down. Her head is not visible; it is inside a cardboard box. One child with blond pigtails stands to the left of the box looking on.*

Homepage Image Description: *Selena Rook stands in a white-walled room wearing a sleeveless navy blue jumpsuit. Perched on her right hip is a medium sized cardboard box.*

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