

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Daisie Cardona

Earnest beauty

by Ellen Miller

A blue aerial hoop and a green hammock hang from the rafters of Christ Church Neighborhood House. Aerialist Daisie Cardona enters, her tan sequined jumpsuit glittering as she reads from a journal clasped in one hand. In her other hand, she grips the mic.

Raised in Kensington, Cardona's show, *Ashes and Iron*, offers a choreographic and poetic take on the experience of growing up in a neighborhood often sensationalized in the news for its challenges with drug use and addiction. But Kensington, as Cardona makes clear, is a home filled with other stories. Throughout the six sections of the show, Cardona alternates between reading her vulnerable and honest poetry, and performing aerial dance alongside fellow aerialist A'ala Rose Marie, examining Kensington as an evolving place rooted in love, heartbreak, and resilience.

In the opening aerial number of the show, "Dancing with the Devil," Cardona spins and spins on the hoop before collapsing to the ground. "Can we rebuild when all that is left of our homes is a pile of ashes and iron?" she asks.

The joy Cardona finds from maneuvering on the hoop while it spins faster and faster is evident in her shimmering eyes and grin as she sets the apparatus spinning again and again. However, it is on the hammock that she truly shines. Flipping into the sling, Cardona begins in a simple stag hold, her body portraying grace and calm. Climbing easily hand over hand up the fabric, she seamlessly alternates her feet, slipping them in and out of the silk to move between shapes. As the hammock spins her in a circle, Cardona hangs upside down from both knees, secured by the loops that she deftly wrapped around herself.

In “We are the World,” Cardona carries the Honduran flag into the audience, swaying and emphasizing her message of hope. In the show’s final moments, she distributes roses to family members, rather than the typical reverse custom of bouquets being given to performers, and hands out awards to Kensington’s advocates and activists.

As a first solo-billed show, *Ashes and Iron* captivates, carried by Cardona’s insistent words and aerial skills. The show is memorable for its merits over some bumpy production moments (like when the show regrettably runs out of time and producers interrupt to prepare the space for the next show). But it is Cardona’s earnestness that I find most compelling. I hope she clings to that sense of purpose, particularly since vulnerable and challenging art like hers can be difficult to produce outside of a structured format like Fringe. Her voice is powerful, authentic, and entirely necessary.

Cardona is determined to display a different story about Kensington. She implores:

“Look around: fire is catching. If we burn, you burn with us.”

[*Ashes and Iron*](#), Christ Church Neighborhood House, Philly Fringe Festival 2025, September 15

Home Page Image Description: *Performer Daisy Cardona, dressed in a black long-sleeved top and black yoga pants with a blue and white patch on one leg, stands facing a building. Seen from behind, she holds the Honduran flag behind her. The flag pole rests on her shoulder.*

Article Page Image Description: *Performer Daisy Cardona rests in a fetal position on her side with her eyes closed. Dressed all in black, one arm stretches above her body, holding a black string taut. The string is connected to a red, orange, and yellow ribbon which rests on the ground.*

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