

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Image Courtesy of the Artist

Good, Beautiful, Perfect, Black, Indigenous, Queer

by Caitlin Green

Without hesitation, Ankole makes clear their commitment to dismantling colonialism and white supremacy, and remembering indigenous traditions. They open the show with a land acknowledgement, uplifting Two Spirit siblings, holding a moment of silence dedicated to queer lives lost, and effortlessly avowing, “free Palestine”.

The BIPOC New Work Track Grant winner, Ankole, is a queer circus arts and wellness community uplifting ITSGE (Intersex, Two Spirit, Gender Expansive) identities. Their newest show, *NFRW/T* magnifies the Egyptian word “Neferu” or “Neferet”, meaning “good, beautiful, perfect”, in a work steeped in intention and tradition. Even the paper programs offer “recipes for balance” - remedies for reconnecting to water, earth, and air, plus a history lesson on the ancient symbolism of the snake, cat, and bird.

Christ Church Neighborhood House hosts Ankole via Cannonball during Black and Indigenous Circus Week. The venue wasn't the best fit for the production's tech needs, with several slow transitions and visual/audio glitches leaving the audience waiting in silence. Nevertheless *NFRW/T*'s ethereal feel and sacred message was well-received.

Performers, Ari (also Ankole's Artistic Director), Dez, and Pharaoh, take the stage in bodysuits that compliment their designated character: Ari as Watersnake in a chic, solid black; Dez as Airbird wearing a swirl of deep blues and purples, and Pharaoh as Earthcat sporting a shimmering brown one piece. Their stature has a regal air, each radiating their unique translation of poise.

Poetry by [Han](#) is recited by Ari between aerial or dance performances. The words echo uplifting sentiments that speak life into the creativity on stage via aerial silks, lyra, and hammock - a verbal illustration of each character's essence while striking visuals by [Sheanni](#) project on the backdrop.

First Watersnake is honored for its commitment to the earth, and its fortitude as a symbol of life, death, and rebirth. Ari fearlessly climbs high to the top of the silks, performing inversions and body rolls that slither. Pharaoh enlivens Earthcat's enigmatic, balanced demeanor in both physicality and attitude. They embrace the dualities of masculine and feminine qualities through demonstrations of active and passive weight, gracefully navigating equilibrium shifts upon the spinning lyra hoop. Dez begins peacefully nesting within the fabric of the yoga hammock before dismounting with the building momentum of the music. In an instant, Airbird takes flight, running and catapulting into a high leap; their summersault is caught by the pendulous hammock. Dez, known for their Punking and Waacking repertoire, continues their segment with a striking upside-down waacking performance.

Concluding the show as a trio, they integrate House, Vogue, Waacking, and African dance in a celebratory resolution. They welcome loved ones from the audience to the stage for an impromptu finale steeped in pride. The moment transports me to the point in the opening remarks when we are reminded that the rage and violence of colonizers, which ultimately led to a retelling of our stories and legacies, have never fully hindered our movement. While "their systems remain... we prevail". Ankole's production of *NFRW/T* is a declaration and reclamation of culture, tradition, and liberation.

[*NFRW/T*](#), [Ankole](#), Christ Church Neighborhood House, Sept. 15-16.

Image Description: *A black graphic with large blue lettering that spells NFRW/T across the center. The word overlays a yellow triangle with images of a bird, cat, and serpent with human figures layered over them are placed at each corner of the triangle. The subtext reads "Neferu", "Neferet", "adj. Egyptian", "good beautiful perfect", "Ankole, a BIPOC, queer proud circus", as well as subtext giving details of the production.*

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