

[Brendan Kiley at the Seattle Times on Ezra Dickinson's Psychic Radio Star:](#)

Ezra Dickinson makes gifts for his mother — gifts she's never seen, and maybe never will.

Dickinson grew up in Bellingham, where he was a sometime caretaker for his mother who, he later learned, is schizophrenic. (He calls it “her imbalance.”) At 18, he left home to study dance at Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts — he'd already been taking the bus to Pacific Northwest Ballet for classes on scholarship.

At Cornish, Dickinson started making dance solos as “gifts” for his mother, who was committed to a psychiatric hospital almost six years ago. In 2013, he performed some of those solos on downtown Seattle sidewalks — including one in front of the now-boarded-up Greyhound station he frequented on his way to ballet class — titled [“Mother for you I made this.”](#)

He'd dance alongside bankers, homeless people and whoever else happened by, sometimes wearing a papier-mâché dinosaur head. The solos, Dickinson said, were inspired by a combination of “things I thought she might like” and “a vulnerability she might be embarrassed by but ultimately proud of.” (She still, he said, “won't acknowledge her imbalance.”) Since graduating from Cornish, Dickinson has worked in film, dance and street art with collectives and companies including the [Maureen Whiting Dance Company](#) and the [New Mystics](#), and his work has been seen from Mumbai to Moscow.

The title of his latest solo work, [“Psychic Radio Star”](#) at On the Boards, came from a conversation with his mother a few years ago. She asked about his art career, then added: “You know, I'm famous, too. I'm a psychic radio star.” There are times, Dickinson said, when his mother “looks at me very honestly and says something she knows I might think is ridiculous — I can almost see this tiny smirk creeping onto her face.”

The “psychic radio star” conversation was one of those times.

The piece is roughly divided into three sections that trace an arc from birth to struggling through life to a celestial, post-mortem ascendance. Those might sound like simultaneously grandiose and oversimplified themes, but Dickinson's dancing in “Star” has a feral — and sometimes frightening — quality. He can point his feet like a

ballerina; crouch in slow agony like a Butoh performer; or undulate, playing with his center of gravity, like a cross between modern dancer and B-boy. But he does it all with the intensity of an exorcism.

“I’m not trying to reference any codified dance styles that have been trained into my body over the years,” he said. He is, in other words, just going for it.

The score, by longtime Dickinson collaborator Paurl Walsh is equally intense, sometimes starting with a simple sound — water trickling, somebody gasping — before layering and building into almost overwhelmingly loud, dense soundscapes.

“Star” begins with the static of heavily overlaid voices — old recordings of Dickinson’s father debating with evangelical Christian radio host Bob Larson that fade into a trickle of water. The stage is empty except for one wooden chair and a sail-like triangle of fabric in one corner, stretching from floor to ceiling. As the water sounds amplify, the sail shows signs of life. At its top, small, ghostly impressions of fingers, then a hand, then a forearm, then a face come and go, as if something were trying to push its way into the world.

The presence slowly descends and Dickinson wriggles his way beneath the fabric and onto the stage — only to find himself harnessed to the sail by a bit (like you’d find on a horse’s bridle) stuck in his mouth. Now he’s “born” and the larger struggle begins.

Even though his mother may never have a chance to see Dickinson’s gifts, he hopes they might help her in some way, “even if it’s on another plane of existence.”

Maybe, he added, somewhere the rest of us know nothing about, she really *is* a psychic radio star.