

Seattle Met Magazine

## A Fiendish Conversation with Ezra Dickinson

The Seattle dancer hits the streets to perform a tribute to his mother.

Written by Seth Sommerfeld: May 6 2013



IMAGE: ANTHONY RIGANO

For our latest *Fiendish Conversation*, we talked to Dickinson about mental illness, dancing in the rain, and Randy Johnson.

What is the theme of this new performance?

The new show is entitled *Mother For You I Made This* and it's built from short solos that I've been creating for my mother for about seven years. My mother is a paranoid schizophrenic, and she has been for most of my life. She wasn't diagnosed until I was probably 18 or so, after I'd already moved out of her house, but looking back on it, all through my childhood she'd kind of been showing signs of being a paranoid schizophrenic. And because I was an only child and I had no other basis for comparison, I didn't really think that it was abnormal in any way.

In a traditional theater space everything can be controlled. How do you plan for the unpredictability of dancing in the streets? Are there plans for if, say, the weather acts up or pedestrians get in the way?

I started making this work when I was a sophomore at Cornish in 2004, and it came out of a choreography project in one of my choreography classes to make an intimate self-portrait. The first kind of investigation of this work I actually ended up setting outside in front of Cornish up on Capitol Hill, and it ended up raining that day. For me, it didn't change the performance in any way. In talking to some of the audience members after the fact, it actually kind of added an element of reality that was kind of unexpected and actually lent itself to the sincerity and the honesty of the performance.

What does it mean to you to not only tackle a show about your mother but also about mental health in our current climate?

Through this piece, the overarching thought for me is just love for my mother, who I feel is a little bit helpless to this illness. But then beyond that is this conversation for our society and for all of us. As I'm creating the work and talking to more people, I'm realizing it's a lot more close to very many of us than I realized before. My aim is to try to activate a conversation about something that, to me, needs to be talked about. It's also something that a lot of us are kind of shy and a little bit afraid—or a little bit alone—in how to talk about this subject and feel like we are engaging in a conversation that can move forward.

Do you have any post-show routines?

For this performance, we're gonna be inviting the audience to participate in a post-show conversation if they so desire, somewhere near the ending location.

If you weren't a dancer, what other line of work might you have pursued?

When I was younger I was kind of at a point in the road where I chose between ballet or baseball. I was a pitcher and I absolutely loved pitching. My pitching idols were Randy Johnson and Nolan Ryan. I was homeschooled when I was younger and basically that gave me a little bit more flexible schedule. So I would go down to the park, when I wasn't doing homework or dancing, and I would make a chalk box on the cement wall down at the park that was near my house and just practice pitching for hours and hours and hours. A couple years after I began doing that I realized one of my neighbors in the apartment building that we lived in had been a pitcher for the Cubs and he had had to stop because of a back injury; he has since become a violin maker. But he coached me on how to pitch and do these things in the right way so I didn't injure myself. Probably if I hadn't continued pursuing ballet, I would've continued pursuing baseball with the same intensity.