

KIRO Radio, Ron and Don Show

In “Mother For You I Made This,” a Seattle Dancer Finds a Stage in the Streets

Written by reporter RACHEL BELLE: May 21, 2013

Seattle dancer and choreographer, Ezra Dickinson, created a piece that describes his relationship with his schizophrenic mother.

Just like the kindergartners who string macaroni necklaces and finger paint colorful pictures that end up on their parents refrigerators, Seattle choreographer Ezra Dickinson’s latest dance performance was created for his mother. Only his picture is not quite as rosy. “Mother For You I Made This” is about Ezra’s tumultuous relationship with his mentally ill mother.

“Soon after she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, she called me up one day and told me over the phone that she was living on the street, in just kind of a casual manner. This really caught me off guard. I didn’t really know what to make of that. And she was kind of being nonchalant about it. I never actually got to see her in that state and I don’t really think she wanted me to at all. This image to me, in my head, of my mother living on the street, was really intense.”

So over the past seven years, he created a dance piece about her that didn’t quite fit onto a standard stage. “The performance begins at the Greyhound Station. From there we travel to the federal courthouse, which I kind of use as a platform to speak my mind about how I feel our state and our society has kind of failed my mother. But has also failed many other mentally ill throughout our country. From there we travel to an alleyway, that’s about a block away, where we show a short music video. From there I lead the audience to a public park that’s up at 7th and Pine.”

Over the span of an hour, the audience follows Ezra as he performs on the streets of Seattle. “Many of the mentally ill in the United States are forced out onto the street because they don’t have any other avenues. So this urban environment adds to the performance and actually is the environment where this kind of neglect is going on in our society.”

Audience members wear headphones to hear the music and sounds that accompany the piece. “Almost, in a way, simulating, possibly, the experience to be a schizophrenic because a lot of times they believe that other people are kind of pushing their thoughts into their brain.”

Ezra grew up with his single mother in Bellingham and started dancing at the age of four. He studied with the Pacific Northwest Ballet for twelve years before attending Cornish, where he got interested in modern dance.

It’s not a coincidence that this show’s run coincided with Mother’s Day. His mom hasn’t seen the show, but she knows about it. Ezra says she is currently at Western State hospital, a psychiatric hospital, and that his show aims to open up dialogues about mental health.

“There’s a lot that we can do to look at this and analyze how we care for these people and how we support them. At the very least, how we can learn to not turn our backs to the subject and look at how we can care for our loved ones. The people that get to witness this performance, they feel as though they’ve been given permission to talk about a subject that was hard to talk about. Confront their own relationships that they have.”

Ezra says this piece is basically a macaroni necklace for his mom.

“I think that parents cherish those gifts. As I’ve grown older, I’ve kind of thought there’s no reason why we should ever stop making things like this for our parents. We grow older, we gain more knowledge. We can actually give them gifts that, with time, mean more and more and more.”