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## [Performance Back to Nature with \*Night Tripper\*](#)

Posted by [Noah Dunham](#) on Mon, Sep 21, 2015 at 4:06 PM



- Courtesy PICA/Florian Rainer
- *Night Tripper's* forest ritual.

About halfway through last night's TBA Performance *Night Tripper*, I was convinced I was caught in a spell. The contemporary dance and music piece developed by [Signe Beckwer](#), [Ingri Fiksdal](#) and [Ingvild Langgård/Phaedra](#) takes place in a forest setting, in this case a meadow in Northwest Portland's Forest Park (the audience met in town and were shuttled to a trail head on a bus), where the *Night Tripper* crew had organized a mixture of installation and performance. The entire atmosphere suggested an intention to engage the audience in the mystery of the natural world. As the audience hiked into the space, colored smoke rose from the forest floor, and clothing such as jackets, pants, and sweatshirts appeared to be coming out of the ground, stuffed with branches, as if the forest had gotten dressed in human apparel. For the lack of a better term, there was the sense that magic was involved.

As the audience was ushered into a circle made up of downed logs and floor mats, we were handed shots of vodka. Note to all future contemporary performance makers: Always start your shows with a shot of something for the audience. They will be delighted. Seriously, the smiles on the faces of people as they were handed small plastic glasses of clear liquid were priceless. Once all were settled, the piece quickly began with two female figures in the middle of the circle, hair drawn over their faces, hands and forearms painted white to match the white shirts they wore. They stood back-to-back, beginning a movement sequence of stepping slowly yet rhythmically around in a circle together. This motion would continue for the remainder of the piece, varying in movement only ever so slightly and fluidly. The two dancers were incredibly in sync; I couldn't figure out how they would know when changes in movement were cued, but they were always together when slight changes or pauses were made.

Accompanying the two figures was a group of musicians (the band [Phaedra](#)) playing their instruments in the outside circle where the audience also sat. Their sound started small, until over the course of several minutes they had built a melodic drone that appeared to be set to the rhythm of the two dancers. Once this happened, sound and motion remained constant, as the performance located and rested within an equilibrium.

What did change, however, was our surroundings. The performance was specifically crafted and timed to line up with the sunset, and as the movement and music grew, the light in the forest slowly drifted away. The piece was pulling us into the present moment, asking us to pay close attention to the gradual change of light as the sun departed. This, coupled with the swelling sound and one-note movements that were becoming harder and harder to see, plus the fact that bats were literally flying over our heads, seeming to react to the sound and bodies, gave it the air of a spell-like ritual (maybe it's because Halloween is right around the corner).

*Night Tripper* also contained some surprises. In one of only a few breaks, a full-blown choir appeared behind the audience and sang while, obscured by brush. I wasn't the only audience member who

afterward noted the chills this induced. Another lovely surprise was the invitation after the performance to join the cast and crew at the “forest bar” (literally a bar-like installation on a tree that presented bottles of booze and cups of snacks for consumption) to mingle and wait for the buses to come pick us up. And then suddenly there we were, drinking, snacking, and talking about art in the middle of a dark forest with strangers. Another note to future contemporary performance makers: Always end your piece with a forest bar in the darkness, if you can manage it.

Climbing back aboard the bus to head back into town, I found myself already disappointed to be returning to an urban environment. We had only been gone for a couple hours, but I’d be lying if I said that I didn’t feel transformed in some way by the experience of seeing *Night Tripper* (which is likely what Beckwer, Fiksdal and Langgård were getting at when creating this piece/concept). At the very least, the performance presents a break from normalcy, a chance to get out of one’s comfort zone, to see an everyday event (a sunset) in a new way. *Night Tripper* speaks to the activity of changing perspective, and what the natural world can suggest to us when we’re paying attention.