

FIELD NOTES



***The Mouth as a Well, the
Loop as a Promise***

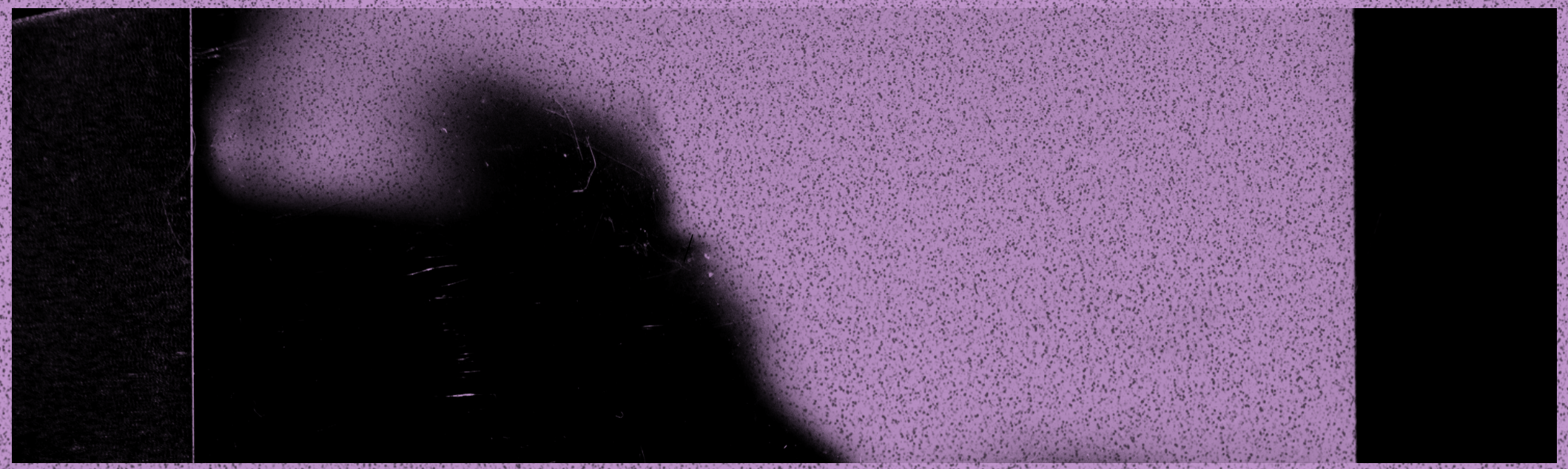
by Isabella Hone-Saunders

reflecting on

Sync Well

by *gemma+molly*

*Presented as part of Dancehouse
Season 1, 18–21 Feb, 2026*



Field Notes is a Dancehouse initiative that commissions writers, academics, and artists to produce in-depth reflections on works within the Dancehouse program. Moving beyond conventional reviews, these texts aim to extend the life of each performance and contribute to a broader conversation about contemporary dance and choreographic practice.

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The performance begins with the low-slung, industrial shudder of a motorbike engine. I later learned the work was, in fact, scored by another mouth. It is a sound that vibrates through the three-sided seating bank, onto the white tarket, and settles in the marrow of the audience. In the bruising glow of blue UV light, we are presented with a tableau of almost suspicious stillness. Molly is on a plinth; Gemma is on the floor. Their bodies are separate, yet anticipatorily ready. We see a water bottle in the centre of the stage, and a plastic bag off to the side, providing a sense of an impending, gestural anchoring. To watch Molly and Gemma is to enter a collaboration defined by what they call 'shitty magic,' a low-fi alchemy where trickery, synchronicity, and the somatic dislodgement of the body collide.

Having developed this work across the porous boundaries of artist-run spaces like KINGS and FELTspace, alongside more typical dance residencies, the duo brings a gallery-born intimacy into the theatre space.

They treat the stage not as a neutral platform, but as a 'holding container', a concept Maggie Nelson uses to describe a vessel that doesn't just hold content, but holds the visceral difficulty of being alive^①. It is a work that resists traditional hierarchies of performance, choosing instead to sit in the leaky space between the animate and the inanimate, where the lines between daydreams and waking realities are intentionally blurred. They treat the stage as a site of collective dreaming, not the saccharine, cinematic kind, but a dreaming that is steeped in the friction between desire and the material world.

Water is the primary material here, but it is never just water. It is a vessel for information, a carrier of memory, and a tool for a specific kind of earnestness. Molly and Gemma conceptualise the work around the motif of the wishing well, a site that requires a sacrifice in exchange for a possibility. There is a profound, shared sincerity in this act; to toss a stone into the dark is to acknowledge a hopeful-hopelessness.



Sync Well (2026), *gemma+molly*. Photo by Gregory Lorenzutti.

The choreography, at times, is visceral and wet. Gemma begins a discreet swilling, a sound that escalates into a rhythmic, liquid gargling as she rolls toward the back of the stage. In the spirit of Anne Carson's writing on the 'spillage' and 'foam' of the creative act, the sound is the physical residue of a body attempting to contain too much^②. It is an internal swirling, the sound of the body being used as an acoustic chamber for the water it contains.

When Gemma eventually spits out what looks like an alfoil-wrapped stone (in actuality, it has been spray painted, adding a layer of metallicism to the taste buds), it feels like the physical extraction of a wish, a piece of shitty magic that is both absurd and deeply moving. Here, the pink plastic bag, a seemingly mundane relic from time spent together in Greece, takes on the weight of an Estelle Hoy-esque provocation.

In Hoy's world, such objects are the discarded containers of 'whispered hopes and dreams,' elevated through a poverty of means into something resembling glamour^③. These silver trinkets, squirrelled away in waistbands and jeans, turn the performers into repositories for hidden intents, echoing the way we carry our own unvoiced desires through the day.





The score, developed with beatboxer April Guest, is a critical apparatus in this negotiation of space. Guest's voice is filtered through Ableton, transformed from the organic breath of a performer into abrasive, metallic flutters and a high-pitched, mosquito-like drone. This transition, from the human-generated to a processed, industrial bass, creates a sense of temporal disorientation.

The use of an iPhone and a microphone to record and loop the sound of gurgling in real-time plays with what the late Elizabeth Freeman calls 'asynchrony.'⁴ As Molly and Gemma's choreography slips in and out of sync with Guest's metallic score, they perform a kind of temporal drag. Their mirroring intentionally breaks and slips; a flute is pulled from a waistband, its sound continuing to play on a loop even after the instrument is removed from the mouth.

This asynchrony is a queer phenomenon, a refusal to stay in lock-step with the "correct" timing of the world. The loop becomes the architecture of the performance, a formula repeated and echoed until the distinction between the original sound and its reflection disappears. This isn't just a technical trick; it is a meditation on how our wishes and daydreams inform our waking realities, circling back until they become the very floor we walk on.

The intimacy between Molly and Gemma is less about narrative and more about a rigorous, somatic enmeshment. Theirs is a method of specificity, a queer propinquity where the reliance on the other's body is a mechanical necessity.



We see this play out choreographically, in the form of a re-established brace, a precarious physical architecture where their stability depends entirely on the friction of skin and the exactitude of a grip. During a sequence of somersaults, their hands remain joined, reaffirming their hold with each rotation. If, as curator Paul Boyé suggests, the contemporary artist is burdened by a tethering to the present, Molly and Gemma use their collaboration to stake a claim on a different kind of future, one built on the labour of osmosis and mutual accountability^⑤. It is a performance of risk that feels like a shared secret, a refusal to let go even as the subterranean hum of the score threatens to dissolve the space.

This is where the shitty magic truly operates. It is an ersatz sublime found in the most mundane materials: silver stones, plastic bottles, and dark denim. The introduction of a chain adorned top, pulled from the bag like a weighted relic from a well, dictates a new orientation for the body. As Molly dons the garment, the weight of the metal is visible; it is an external burden that glimmeringly reflects the overhead UV light, a physical manifestation of the weight of a wish. Their synchronicity in this moment, a pause in a one-legged hold with heads turned, looking over shoulders, is a moment of collective resistance against the gravity of their own dreaming. They are anchored by the water bottle, which remains an upright, spatial reference point amidst the diagonal shifts of the light.



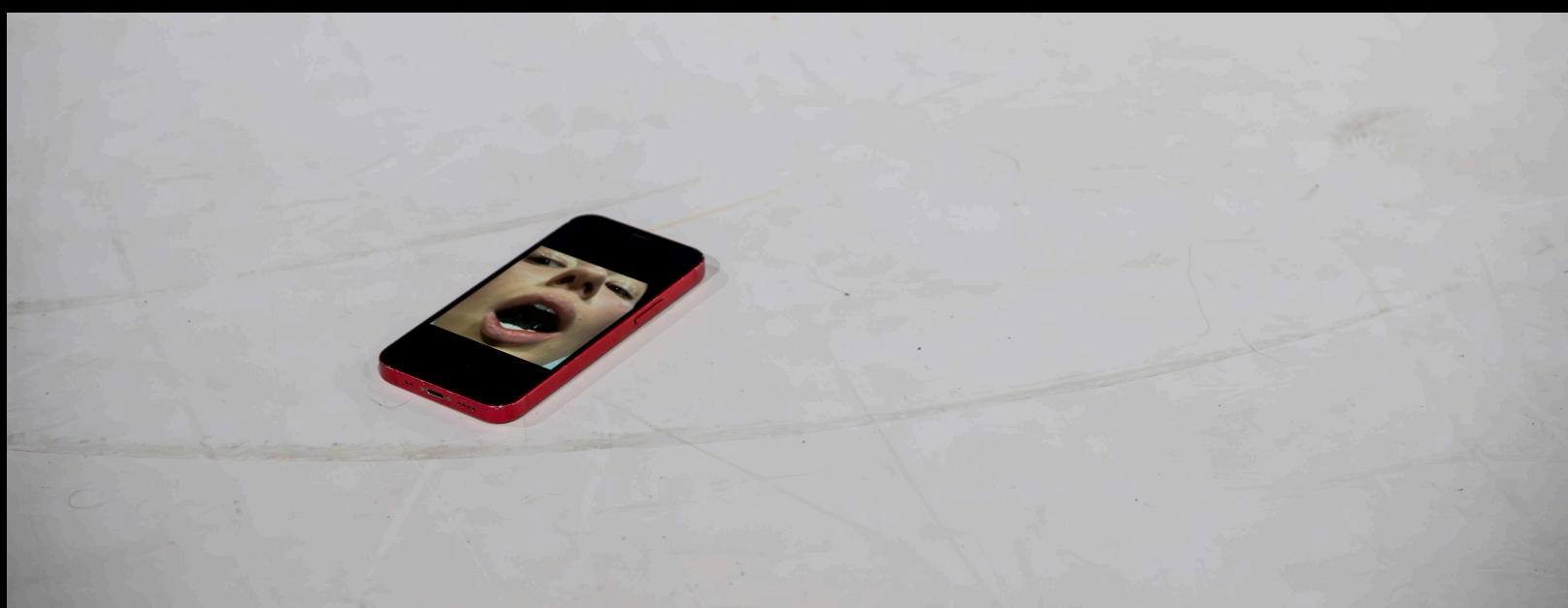
Sync Well (2026), *gemma+molly*. Photo by Gregory Lorenzutti.

Toward the end, the work moves from the technical to the affective. Molly sits on the floor, crying. Whether the tears are real or drawn from the water bottle, the affect is the same. The water that was previously gargled and contained is now expelled as grief. It is leaky water, a signifier of the human messiness that refuses to be contained by the loops of the score or the edges of the tarkett.

The motorbike sound returns, bookending the experience and signalling a shift back to the beginning. The stage is strewn with the debris of the performance, the aluminium sheet, the plastic bag, the upright water bottle acting as a solitary spatial anchor. My eye is drawn to the glimmering studs on their clothes, the sparkling silver zips on the cuffs of their pants that catch the shifting light. They return to a final loop: bending down, turning around, picking up, dropping. It is a reset, a return to the original state of the well.



The cycle is finally broken not by a grand climax, but by a quiet, clandestine exchange. Molly pulls one last stone from her mouth and passes it, mouth-to-mouth, to Gemma. It is a pact, a secret, a shared promise. As the lights cut to black, we are left with the lingering image of the mouth as a container—a well that holds both the water and the wish.



Sync Well (2026), *gemma+molly*. Photo by Gregory Lorenzutti.

References:

1. Maggie Nelson, *Like Love: Essays and Conversations*, London: Random House, 2024, ix.
2. Anne Carson, 'Cassandra Float Can,' in *Float*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016, 4.
3. Estelle Hoy, *Pastiche*, Berlin: After 8 Books, 2021, 5.
4. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 20.
5. Paul Boyé, 'Does collaboration have a future?,' *Memo Review*, Issue 2 (Spring/Summer 2024/25).

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