

Stefanie Noll Never Really Had a Home. Instead, She Created One.

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Stefanie Noll is a wanderer. Not the type that takes lengthy walks, or explores big cities on foot, or drives the long way home, but the type whose phone breaks and she doesn't care to get it replaced for months on end. Noll repeatedly lives out of a suitcase, bouncing around from house, to hotel, to couch, to hostel. She rarely experiences physical attachment, and holds personal autonomy in the highest regard. It's only natural that she's an artist.

Born in Kyiv, Ukraine, Noll began dancing as a child, growing up in the United States and training in New York City before attending—and dropping out of—college. At 21, she moved to Vancouver to join Ballet BC, a contemporary ballet company, as an emerging artist. And now, at 23, a job landed her in her current location: London.

As a sought-after international dancer, her movement style can only be explained by way of liquid. Watching her evokes an emotion that can only be felt through the language of art, her body moving luxuriously as if it were silk. She is as mysterious as she is magnetic, effortlessly commanding attention with a quiet strength that complements grace and fluidity.

Though busy as she is, she graciously invited me to chat with her on a Monday evening. We spoke over zoom as she entered her new London apartment after a full-day rehearsal, of which she said, "I feel way more myself after I've been dancing for eight hours." She stretched as we chatted, her honey-brown hair spilling over her navy turtleneck and her eyes closed in thought with a particular carefulness to her responses, as if pondering internal truths while reflecting on her experiences. Our conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity.

What are you working on right now?

I recently joined Punch Drunk. They're a London-based company. We are working on a new show called "The Burnt City." Right now, it's still confidential until they disclose all of the information, but it's based around a Greek tragedy. It's a 3-hour, full-length show with actors and cabaret performers and dancers. We premiere in the spring.

Dang, 3 hours is a long time.

Yeah, I know. And I just got winded from walking up two flights of stairs to my apartment, so...

What is the hardest part about dancing internationally?

Every country is totally different. I left Vancouver in May, and since then I did three months on the East Coast for a residency, then two months in Kyiv, then two weeks in Washington, D.C. Bouncing around for so long with just a suitcase is thrilling and intriguing at first, but it gets really fatiguing. The cherry on top was moving to a new country and taking three weeks to find an apartment and get settled.

Tell me a bit about your childhood.

I was born in Kyiv. When I was very young, I moved to Kansas City, Missouri. And when I was 15, I moved to New York City to train for dance. Living in different places gave me a wider appreciation for differences and people and approaches to life. I don't always feel like I have a home, or a rooted foundation. People ask me where I'm from, and I'm like, "I don't know." What's interesting is how dance has brought me to so many places, and made me travel or meet the people that are important in my life. It's shaped me on a lot of different levels.

Going back to that idea of home, or lack thereof, what is home to you?

My parents house in Missouri. It's something that's always stable, that I can go back to. It's a place in my life that's synonymous with rest and rejuvenation. Side note though, I have learned that if I'm there for too long I go literally insane. It's all about small doses.

What do your parents do?

My mom is the founder and director of a publishing press for art and artist's books in Kyiv. It's called RODOVID press. And my father was a music ethnologist specializing in Polish and Ukrainian folk music, but when he had kids he moved back to the states [Missouri] to be a part of his dad's family business in real estate.

Do you consider yourself a dancer or choreographer?

Dancer. I love choreographing, but in a way it has made me realize how much I love dancing and performing. Being a dancer feels more true to where I am right now. I want to feel physical. I want to sweat and I want to be involved in creative decisions, but at the end of the day I want to be performing them.

What are you inspired by? Is there a place that you pull from?

Small things in everyday life. Cinematic moments walking down the street. More than anything, the people I surround myself with. I love learning. I think sometimes inspiration can happen out of nowhere, but I also don't think having to search for inspiration is a bad thing. It's a natural pathway of being an artist and maintaining your appetite. I love movement that has a lot of depth and research with it. Intention and purpose keep me inspired. I look for inspiration in people, in art, and I love to read. I read every morning.

What are you reading right now?

Source material from the show [that she is rehearsing for]. I can't share the title, but it's a dystopian novel written in the 20th century based off Greek tragedy. I finished all the other Greek plays from the material, and I was like, "Damn, I really need to read something written within the past thousand years."

Do you have a favorite book or author?

I love Susan Sontag and Virginia Woolf. I love reading about art history and art analysis for art history.

If you weren't a dancer, what would you be doing?

I'm so intrigued by art history, so probably something in that field. Or something in journalism. I love writing.

Being in and from so many places, how do you feel like that's affected your artistry?

You naturally collect from different places pieces of your own personality. I feel like that creates a mosaic. I'm an artist that craves newness and is invigorated when I get it, so bouncing around feeds into that. It's also a weakness in a way. I know that I flee. Now, I feel my moves are more rooted, but there have been a few times when I have told myself, "You need to sit here longer." And I did. And those were some of my best decisions.