



NEW/ADVENTURES

DOORSTEP DUETS 2025 – MEET THE CHOREOGRAPHER

Finding Your Own Rhythm: The Inspiration Behind "My Feet Don't Quite Touch the Floor"

Have you ever felt a little out of step with the world around you? Like you're marching to a different drum, or perhaps your feet just don't quite touch the floor in the same way as everyone else's? Choreographer **Shelby Williams** explores just this in her new piece, **"My Feet Don't Quite Touch the Floor,"** our Doorsteps Duet offering for 2025. It's a work that promises to spark joy, create powerful impact, and, perhaps, change the world one step at a time.

A Conversation with Shelby Williams

Q: Shelby, your new piece is titled "My Feet Don't Quite Touch the Floor." Where did that title and the core idea for the work come from? A: You know, it started from a very relatable place: school. Almost everyone has a connection to it, right? Whether you're in it, going to it, or you've been. I felt it was a beautiful starting point for a show meant for many different people. Then, I began thinking about how more and more people are being identified as neurodivergent and how challenging it can be for them to fit into our world's rigid structures – especially schools. Schools often train us for conventional jobs, but we need creative thinkers now more than ever.

I just started to wonder, what if school *wasn't* like that? What if it was designed *by and for* neurodivergent and creative people? Imagine a learning environment where accommodations were made so they could truly thrive, developing a lifelong love of learning, rather than just surviving it.

The title itself comes from a powerful story in Ken Robinson's book, "The Element." He tells of a young Gillian Lynne – yes, of *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera* fame! – who, back in the 1930s, was struggling in school. She was disruptive, found it hard to sit still. Her mum took her to a psychologist, and Gillian remembers sitting on this enormous sofa, so big her feet didn't quite touch the floor.

The psychologist quietly took her mum outside and told her to just watch. When Gillian was left alone in the room, she began to dance, expressing herself freely. The doctor turned to her mum and said, "Miss Lynne, your daughter is not ill. She's a dancer. Put her in dance classes." And that's exactly what her mum did.

This was in the 1930s, before we understood conditions like ADHD. Yet, we still ask children to exist in structures where they can't move to think. It's a call to change, to create environments where young people can truly be who they are.

Q: Your protagonist is described as a neurodivergent "daydreamer" named Reverie. Why was it important to centre this piece around such a character, and how do themes of daydreaming and difference come into play? A: I really wanted to reclaim daydreaming as a positive. For many with an ADHD diagnosis, it's often seen negatively. Yet, the human ability to

reflect in a wandering, creative way, to *invent* what's next, is exclusive to us. We need to do a lot of inventing right now to solve big, bold issues.

Think about those "shower moments" – when a solution suddenly hits you because you're unplugged, and your mind can wander. Charles Dickens went for walks for the same reason! It's vital that we make time to daydream and wonder. While it's amazing we can find answers instantly on our phones now, I wanted us to physically inhabit a world of wonder for a moment. I hope the audience leaves feeling uplifted but also challenged to go off and wonder what *they* can wonder about and then make a difference.

Reverie could be anyone – you, me, a child, someone you pass on the street. We have a natural rhythm to our world, and we want everyone to fit into it. But for some, it's not that they *won't*; they *can't*. I want to celebrate that! What if we, instead, fell in step with them?

There's a key moment in the show where Reverie notices everyone else doing something, and they don't know how to do it. Instead of shutting down, they share their movement, their wonder, their ideas. We're going to celebrate not falling in line, because it's those people who sometimes can't fall in line who teach us all a new step.

Q: What do you hope audiences take away from "My Feet Don't Quite Touch the Floor," especially those who might be new to dance or experiencing it in community settings like care homes? A: My biggest hope is that the piece captures their attention, makes them think, "What's going on here? Something interesting is happening!" Then, I hope they feel something, a connection. We're telling a story without words, and I want them to know exactly what's going on and perhaps see themselves in some aspect of the story.

Ultimately, I want them to go away and talk about it, to share one thing they learned or felt with someone else. Whether it's the person next to them, one of the dancers, a neighbour, or a friend – I want the piece to resonate, to feel like it was meant for them, because it is.

For those in challenging environments, like care homes, there's a powerful parallel. While school is an institutional experience, these individuals might also feel a lack of agency or freedom. But they still possess a sense of wonder. We're not comparing their experiences but drawing attention to that universal human capacity to dream, to create, to connect through empathy, regardless of physical freedom. If just one person shifts the way they think or feel that day, that week, that year, then for me, this piece has been an absolute success.