

Thursday September 6 2007

Arts

Eclectic ideas, vividly performed

Dancenow/NYC Festival

Dance Theater Workshop, New York

Many years ago Dance Theater Workshop was a modest mecca for nascent talent, unknowns and semi-unknowns such as Mark Morris and Twyla Tharp. Now those two and others like them are mainstream celebrities in the dance world, and DTW is still presenting emerging artists, albeit in fancier surroundings. Glass walls frame a spacious street entrance lobby with café. The auditorium is bigger, the seats comfortable, the performance space equipped with technical hoopla undreamt of years ago. But as if to prove that it remains true to its pioneering nature, it is hosting the 13th annual Dancenow/NYC Festival, the difference being that these are not all experimental artists struggling to make a name but some very well-known ones such as Gus Solomon Jr and Gina Gibney: in all 70 choreographers, several celebrating their 10th year in the profession. The programmes are eclectic, changing nightly and necessarily brief.

The opening night proved that experience counts although youth can charm. If a little too much emphasis was placed on female soloists such as Sara Hook and Helen Pickett interpreting unspecified themes of love or just generally throwing themselves about, this was compensated for by the sophisticated *Under My Skin*. Choreographed in 2005 by Myrna Packer and Art Bridgman, and performed by them, it began with a video projection of their bare backs, through which the two emerged to dance disco-style to Ken Fields's bouncy score. Through the magic of Peter Bobrow and Jim Monroe's video, they danced with each other and with multiples of themselves coming and going in changing costumes, ending up with a full-scale disco crowd of their own images.

The usually ingenious Larry Keigwin's *Finger Suite* to Satie



Supple moves: Murray Louis Dance perform 'Porcelain Dialogues'

Steven Schreiber

seemed a bit watery after that, with Michael Blake, Keith Sabado and Valda Setterfield performing a lot of droll fingerwork while trying to outmanoeuvre each other. *New Work*, still to be officially premiered next year, had Isadora Wolfe, a dancer with an excitingly airy jump and facile way of moving, performing Johannes Wieland's solo, where every so often she would break off to ask someone in the audience: "Are you happy?" Her interpretations of the replies, if that's what they were, were unclear but danced with conviction.

Welcome To My Garden had four female Elvis Presley fans taking turns to hold up a picture of a garden. While one sat at a table and the other lay under it, another separately performed angry gyrations on another chair. It ended with all four warbling a cappella "Love Me Tender", which was more than one wanted to do with this piece choreographed by Neta Pulvermacher.

Former Martha Graham dancer Donlin Foreman is imbued with Graham's technique: it's embedded in his every muscle and sinew as he demonstrated superbly in his own *Self*

Portrait w/Ghosts... on Common Ground. Wearing jeans, shirt (and eyeglasses) he conveyed, to music by Andrew Waggoner, the moods of a passionate man, torn and longing, haunted by memories.

Another well-established figure, Murray Louis, was honoured on his 80th birthday by former members of his company performing the second movement of his *Porcelain Dialogues*: three couples tenderly dancing to Tchaikovsky's Quartet in D major.

Gus Solomon Jr's highly dramatic *Paradigm* is a marital triangle with Hope Clark, Carmen de Lavallade and the choreographer, all in rustling silks. It's an essay in strained loyalties seethingly performed, with the three crisscrossing and double-crossing each other in rhythmic walking and stylised gestures.

Interview by Claire Porter showed how ingenious use of words and movement can turn a job hunt into the interview from hell. Clever and witty, Porter can simultaneously talk and dance a streak. This was performance art at its best. ★★★★★
Tel +1 212 924 0077

Hilary Ostlere