

## THOSE SUMMER NIGHTS

### AMERICAN DANCE FESTIVAL

PAGE AUDITORIUM AND REYNOLDS INDUSTRIES THEATRE, DUKE UNIVERSITY, DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA  
JUNE 12-JULY 26, 1997

REVIEWED BY SUSAN BROILI

The American Dance Festival's sixty-third year and twentieth season in Durham was packed with programs that offered plenty of works worth watching. The best dances can live up even the most bone-weary dancegoer. Programs by the African American Dance Ensemble and the International Choreographers project did that for me. Chuck Davis's ensemble of strong, passionate, and acrobatic dancers has never looked or sounded better. Dressed in white, dancers moved with meditative grace to the heartbeat of drums, harmonica, and violin in Ronald K. Brown's premiere, *Free*, both an affirmation of hope and a recognition of the forces that can kill it. Repeated movements, such as clearing ground and casting seed, and the constant flow of dancers, often walking, gave a sense of perseverance.

The International Choreographers program featured premieres set on ADF students by David Grenke (from the U.S.), Myriam Hervé-Gil (France), and María Rovira (Spain). Rovira's *Alé (The Essential Breath)* proved the most innovative work. It opened with blue light on a misty stage as a woman stood, balanced, and swung on a trapeze in various ways. Even on the ground, group movements looked airy. In another section, three women undulated their hips, moving playfully to a toy piano tango. Finally, a woman swayed, head down, her feet wrapped around trapeze ropes, then slid down the ropes into the arms of a man.

Grenke presented a life lesson in how to fall and get up again in his multimedia *Humpty-Dumpty*, in which a woman fell repeatedly. The soft slap of her landing was nothing compared to the splat of other dancers hitting a wall and then the floor. Hervé-Gil's *Julot and Nini* dealt, in one brief section, with men abusing their waltz partners, who played a role in their own victimization by coming back and playing up to the men. But mostly, the work celebrated the waltz. Even the audience was invited to dance. Soon the stage was filled with waltzers.

Another ballroom dance, the tango, inspired Paul Taylor's premiere,

## REVIEWS NATIONAL



Bruce Feeley

**Trisha Brown's company revealed the first glimpse of her re-creation of Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo* with the premiere of *Canto/Pianto* in Durham.**

*Piazzolla Caldera*. It takes its cue from the fiery, bittersweet, and dark emotions of Astor Piazzolla's music, which leads Taylor into a new, more theatrical direction that looks at both the sexy surface and seamy underside of life viewed through social dance.

Pilobolus Dance Theatre also plunged into the emotional realm in its new *Gnomes*, a male quartet that is its most powerful, personal dance to date. Dedicated to the memory of Pilobolus dancer Jim Blanc, who died of complications arising from AIDS last year, the dance is the troupe's caring send-off to spiritual transcendence. It began with four dancers linked in one rolling hoop and ended with them sitting Zen-like, on their heels, knees on the floor. In an unforgettably poignant image, three men used their toes to lift the other man several inches from the floor and gently swung him, as though rocking a baby in heaven.

Trisha Brown went the other way—to Hades. Even so, twelve minutes there was not nearly long enough as she presented the premiere of *Canto/Pianto* from her re-creation of Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo*. I could watch her combination of liquid, effortless, no-bones movements and angular torques even as fire singed my feet. Dancers looked like flames as they rose and fell, trying to get to Eurydice, but she's rescued by Orpheus—this time.

Mark Haim showed the full version of his long-evolving work, *The Goldberg Variations*. He earned applause for the sheer audacity and courage in performing thirty solos to Bach's music of the same name, played live by pianist André Gribou. Haim avoided the soloist's pitfall of self-absorption and, with sincerity, humor, and inventive use of stagecraft, won the audience's trust in this seventy-four-minute tour de force. In one variation he undressed and threw his clothes

offstage, only to have another set thrown down to him. In another, he invited audience members to literally move him, but turned the tables by telling them to freeze; then he manipulated them.

Donald Byrd's style also provided mesmerizing moments; his marriage of the mercurial quickness and grace of ballet with idiosyncratic gestures was best illustrated in the "I Got the Wilis" section of his *Life Situations: Daydreams on Giselle*. In it, black-wigged Wilis in frothy skirts covered and twitched like subservient animals

## JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL

TED SHAWN THEATRE AND STUDIO/THEATRE,  
BECKET, MASSACHUSETTS  
JUNE 24-AUGUST 24, 1997

REVIEWED BY AMANDA SMITH

At Jacob's Pillow this year, the spirits of some of those who paused here and left their marks seemed in evidence everywhere. This sixty-fifth Pillow season, the final one with Sali Ann Kriegsman as director, was itself dedicated to Bessie Schönberg, who taught composition at the outdoor dance festival. A party in the charming tea garden paid homage to

Stanislas Wisniewski, consoled and supported by Pierre Advokatoff. The ten other dancers who surround them represent not only a dance company but the presence and sweep of humanity itself surrounding the vortex of personal crisis. As the dead do not completely leave us—their spirits linger on—the Central Figure disappears and reappears throughout the course of the dance, once waltzing with his solacing friend. In the end, the Figure runs on, then is caught by the light as he walks off.

What is so fine about this work is its clarity and the complexity of its structure, its balance between the Platonic and the Aristotelian—that which is felt and that which is structure—its complicated and often prismatic floor patterns, and, finally, its profound portrayal of grief and empathy.

Standing in the shadow of *Central Figure* were the other works from Lyons, Maguy Marin's *Contrastes*, a comic-dramatic piece from the raincoat school of French choreography, and Hervé Robbe's abstract, absurdist *Miss K.*, to Mozart.

The late American choreographer Ulysses Dove was beautifully represented by *Dancing on the Front Porch of Heaven*, performed by Stockholm 59° North, in the debut of this troupe comprised of soloists from the Royal Swedish Ballet. In a company unusually full of wonderful men, Anders Nordström particularly caught the eye. Dancing first with Anna Valev to Rachmaninoff in *Grass*, and then to a pounding score by Martinu in Nils Christie's *Before Nightfall*,



Courtesy LNOP

Lyons National Opera Ballet presented Susan Marshall's moving, magnificent *Central Figure* at both the American Dance Festival and Jacob's Pillow.

whenever their queen appeared.

The French ended this season with panache. Lyons National Opera Ballet demonstrated a flair for both the abstract and the dramatic in its ADF debut program of works by Hervé Robbe, Susan Marshall, and Maguy Marin. It was a real treat to see vintage work by the talented Marin, and her 1979 *Contrastes*, set to music by Béla Bartók, was a good choice for a finale. The gap between the wealthy and the working class was vividly illustrated by a line of round-shouldered, gray-suited office workers observing a butler serving a couple so blasé they never noticed the almost-nude man and woman stretched out on their table. *Contrastes* ended as the workers trudged off, but as the very last one was about to disappear, she kicked up her heels—a fitting image to end a season of dance, as it speaks of the ability of this art to lift us above the everyday grind. ■

Jess Meeker, long the Pillow's music director, while inside "the barn," Ted Shawn's original theater, John Lindquist's photos showed Meeker in 1938, dapper in an era when men still wore white suits. Both Schönberg and Meeker died this year.

Fittingly, loss and the coming to terms with loss were the subjects of the finest piece by far, Susan Marshall's moving, magnificent *Central Figure*, a major work, substantial in anyone's season. The genesis of the dance was the loss of Arthur Armijo, the dancer with whom the choreographer had worked the longest. Made on and presented here by the experimental Lyons National Opera Ballet, the work was rightly the centerpiece of the French company's program.

Set against Donald Baechler's drop of black dots on a gray field and Philip Glass's churning String Quartet No. 5, the dance focuses on a central figure representing Armijo, well danced by

## REVIEWS INDEX

### FEATURED REVIEW

Royal Ballet .....94

### NATIONAL

Durham, N. C.: American Dance Festival...96

Becket, Massachusetts:

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.....97

Nat'l View: Lab., Projekt Group-USA;

Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival...98 & 106

San Francisco: Summerfest/Dance '97 ...100

Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor

Summer Festival .....102

Boulder & Denver:

Colorado Dance Festival .....104

Boone, North Carolina:

An Appalachian Summer Festival...106

### NEW YORK CITY

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo..108

ODC/San Francisco.....108

NYC View: New York Baroque Dance

Company; American Ballet Theatre's

Summer Intensive .....110

Trinity Irish Dance Company.....112

Please note: Send your press releases describing events of professional caliber to Gary Parks, Reviews Editor, Dance Magazine, 33 W. 50 St., New York, NY 10023.