

Attitude

: THE DANCERS' MONTHLY

Mark Haim & Dancers

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Mark Haim & Dancers
Riverside Dance Festival, N.Y.C.

PROGRAM note: "Mark Haim thanks all those who have supported and encouraged the farfetched idea of forming yet another modern dance company in New York City—the dancers for their commitment, dedication, perseverance, patience and understanding OF HIS RIDICULOUSLY HIGH STANDARDS" (caps mine). There is a tacit suggestion in that sentence that other artistic directors' standards are—well, you finish the thought, a rather obvious example of the young without a trace of that overworked but accurate word "humility."

Front Lines is a work that appears a comment on past, current and possible, future events. It possesses a 1984 Orwellian tone, attempts to make some political statement, not pointing a finger at any particular country but leaving us to draw our own conclusions. Dancers marched about, with the music group aptly named "The Art of Noise." Here is a Nazi-like strutting, stiff-backed, stiff-legged, dancers stepping into

the wings, evidently running like heck around to the opening side again so that seven dancers seemed like a lot more in an unending stream of marchers.

In their marching, they are frozen robots staring ahead, while voices mumble on tape with words we cannot decipher. They insert ritual salutes, a half-turn and back as they strut. We watch a series of drill-like movements; a woman starts to cave in, then straightens at the sound of approaching steps. She scrabbles, clutches at herself, there is a "shoulder arms" bit; a man marches about on guard duty. The air is distinctly militaristic in a kind of rock and roll fashion and Haim has made his point by now, but he either does not know how to end the work or does not choose to. There are too many clichéd insertions, people now racing back and forth in random, erratic pulses of movement on almost absurdly nimble feet. There is no mistaking what this work tried to do, which could have been done in half the time, thus, more tellingly. Long on energy, short of subtlety.

The work that makes one certain Haim has talent is *Settings and Clearings*. A good-

sized metal table has evidently been secured into the stage floor. The performers here might be sad inmates of an asylum or, possible, prisoners in their recreation period. The performers move in, on, under, around this immovable object, slither across, scrabble atop, reach and pull themselves onto it, fall off, lean, collapse, drape themselves around it. Bare feet hit the floor with a sturdy solid slap. These people are drowned in a sea of despair, hopelessness, writhing as though in the final moments before a cyanide death. Pruning this piece would make it, too, more powerful. Despite some pretentiousness, we sense here good ideas, imagination, structure. In an about-face, perhaps Haim intended that table as a perverted security blanket.

Haim should be slightly less ambitious and pressured at this point. He is young enough to learn and apply the punch of brevity, to slow down. He has lots of years ahead of him, if he doesn't burn out quickly from sheer physical exhaustion. Talent must be carefully nurtured, husbanded, cherished, not merely displayed like a banner. •