

Reviews

*A New Generation of Dance
in Westchester*
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ONE might expect a dance concert featuring fourteen different choreographers to be a marathon event capable of taxing even the most enthusiastic of audiences. But the Dance in Education Fund's annual concert, *A New Generation of Dance in Westchester*, on Nov. 10 and 11, at the Emelin Theatre in Mamaroneck, flowed smoothly and easily for just over two hours and was punctuated by some refreshingly original and technically strong work by young area professionals. The concert also featured guest artist Peter Sparling in his most recent solo work.

Sparling, a principal dancer in the Martha Graham Company, presented two solos from *Nocturnes*, danced to two nocturnes by Chopin. Clad in stylish baggy pants and shirt, Sparling moved in a stiff, restrained manner from one

straight leg or attitude pose to the next. It was only toward the end of the first nocturne that the movement acquired some character, with gestures of joy giving way to movements of anger and frustration. In the interlude between pieces, the mood changed entirely, and by the second nocturne, the style had considerably loosened, and beautiful spins were falling into floorwork with a lyrical sense of ebb and flow.

Solos predominated in the works of the young choreographers, the most original of which was Barbara Jo Fleming's *Quantity*, a humorous and provocative piece about numbers that had serious political overtones. The text by Susan Griffin was spoken aloud by the dancer and ranged from counting simple possessions at the beginning of the piece, to counting bombs, the starving and the dead by the work's end. Clothed very cleverly in a skirt of numbers and symbols and a leotard wrapped with an oversized measuring tape, *Quantity* was very well performed by Susan Hogan, whose voice remained clear and projected throughout the rather strenuous movement.

Anima was choreographed and performed by Janis Brenner to music by Kenneth Schafer. Brenner's piece was an abstract solo consisting of recurring motifs performed at various speeds with shifting qualities, most of the movement taking place under an overhead spot. Costumed in a beautiful, glittery blue, Brenner exhibited a strong technique rooted in a firm sense of balance.

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Peter Sparling
Photo: David Fullard

Vigil, a solo choreographed and danced by Holly Fairbank to music by John Kuhlman, was a darkly intense work danced entirely on a diagonal. Fairbank is a very fluid mover, and she played with rapid changes in quality and thrown movements abruptly softened. Though it was interesting movement, the work as a whole needed more development.

Jennifer Salk choreographed and danced *Starkraving* to an electronics, voice and percussion score by David Byrne and Brian Eno. The title alluded to a quality that never materialized and the music was merely background filler, abruptly fading out after serving its purpose and adding less to the work than if she had danced in silence. However, Salk is an extremely strong and supple mover with an obvious gymnastic background that she uses to full advantage and she created some fascinating sculptural shapes that were riveting to watch despite the lack of emotional content.

Clifford Shulman danced his own solo entitled *Quest*. He divided the dance into two sections through his use

of music, the first to a short piece by Ralph Towner, and the second to a very scratchy recording of Chick Corea, which was abruptly and clumsily cut off at the end of the dance. There was no movement differentiation between the two sections and no clear reason for a big music change, a very poor use of recorded music.

The most adventurous of the group pieces was *Psyche-Art P501*, a trio choreographed by Lisa Green in collaboration with Wendel Pierce and Ralph Zito. This was a clever performance piece for two male speakers and a female dancer using a text collage assembled from quotations of psychologists Arnheim and Gallie. The first section had the two speakers spouting overlapping monologues; "Art may seem to be in danger of being drowned by talk..." as the dancer dipped and swirled about the stage in an oddly fitting red dress. In the next section, one of the men read a text on balance as he walked about, occasionally serving as a balance point for the dancer's wild poses. The third section found the other speaker tap dancing while blowing up a balloon

and occasionally discoursing on shape and color. Gradually, many other colored balloons filled the stage, and the finale, "What is art?", had the two men systematically breaking all the balloons as the dancer struggled to preserve them. A witty commentary and a charming piece.

Heidi Latsky's trio *Trial and Error*, was a high-energy work combining sharp, convoluted arm movements with walking patterns and soft releases creating striking juxtapositions between the three dancers. The jazz-rock score, Al di Merla's "Flight Over Rio," was a very mediocre example of the genre and added nothing to the work except a beat.

The most puzzling work on the program was Mark Haim's *Servitude*, danced by four women in peasant garb to the music of J.S. Bach. The piece opened in silence, the women walking in hunched over positions. As the music began, the movement opened out into anguished falls and frantic skittering that gave clear illustration to the work's title. This was a focused and effective work with its dark, troubling, medieval quality beautifully danced by the four women.

The most glaring weakness of the works on this concert was the overall lack of attention to the music. Instead of dance scores, the choreographers used generally unchallenging music as background or only to provide a beat, often fading or cutting at the whim of the choreography and with no concern for the integrity of the music as a whole. Trudy Martin's *Tales* was the only composer/choreographer collaboration on the concert, a trio performed with singer/composer Judy Carson, whose partly improvised vocal score was a brave attempt at making music and dance work together.

Passing On was a tender duet choreographed by Andrew Janetti to the music of Oregon, and *Verdaccio* was a cautiously danced pas de deux by Marcus Schulkind, commissioned by the Dance in Education Fund. The Fund also commissioned two other works specifically for the advanced students of the Steffi Nossen School managed by the Fund. Both pieces, one by Jo-Ann Burggemann and the other by Gaetan Young, featured large numbers of dancers in a dizzying swirl of exits and entrances. These pieces would seem to belong more appropriately on a student recital than on this program designed to showcase up and coming professionals. †