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Talented visitors from the Vineyard

THE YARD - Presented by the Dance Umbrella at the Boston Shakespeare Theater last night. Program repeats tonight.

By Debra Cash
Special to the Globe

In an artists' colony on Martha's Vineyard, five choreographers have plied their trade through the summer. Now they've boated over the the mainland to show us what they've learned. It's unusual - and a pleasure - to see an anthology of premieres that demonstrate so much sheer competence.

Patricia Nanon, who directs The Yard in Chilmark, offered the menacing "Deep Tides," a journey to Anna Sokolow land, where dancers moved together but rarely seemed to know it. The work introduced the evening's performers: short, tensely powerful wom-

en like Caroline Billings and Lisa Gillette; the crew-cut-topped Bill Bissel, whose incomplete motions had the disarming, unself-conscious grace of a mentally disabled adult; and Scot Willingham, shaking his shoulder as if to push aside the world.

Emotions are neurological in Monica Levy's "Beside the Night." There is barely time for a person to respond to someone's touch, never enough to consider it. Twitching gives way to virtuosic leaps and a dancer beating her fists in the air. Later Levy adds a funny motif of shrugged shoulders with audible sighs. There are brief, punk-inflected incidents in which the dancers startle and jerk their too-heavy heads.

Elvis Presley songs rise from a mist of radio static in Terese Freedman and Jim Coleman's "Past Perfect Present Tense." Unlike the way Twyla Tharp approached Frank Sinatra, they

never take Presley at his word. "Hound Dog" is a rude compression of doggy scratching and human grapplings, while "Love Me Tender" goes haywire with the dancers revved up and throttled. In the ghostly couple who echo Billings and Willingham, and the way the lyrics shortchange the exhausted feelings behind the gestures, "Tense" fantilizes with other, richer directions the choreography might have taken.

The surprisingly rigorous penultimate section of Mark Haim's "Four Chorale Preludes" indicates what the Joffrey Ballet sees in this young choreographer. After a jam-packed female solo, the other dancers paddle their bodies against the floor. When they return to the safety of a lineup, a kneeling, Buddhalike naked man reaches out behind them in supplications that seem ultimately religious.

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