

DANCE / JANE RIGNEY

In spite of unexciting choreography Festival's dancing exceptional

Some of the finest modern dancers in town were on display at the Riverside Dance Festival last week. The occasion was the Riverside "Choreo Showcase IV." Although the new choreography was mostly unexceptional and only sporadically promising, the dancers were not to be missed.

There were seven dances by three choreographers. Two were new; the most complex and most ambitious was the one that ended the program: Mark Haim's *Settings and Clearings*.

The odd, percussive music was by Haim and DeKoddi. The scene was a dining room table, so high (perhaps a child's-eye-view) that

the cast could never have sat at it. Upon it stood a lantern, the only light. The first five minutes, the dancers moved around it, till one (Hikari Baba) took away the lantern and stage lighting appeared.

The dancers rolled and writhed under the table as, in turn, each climbed up on it and jumped off, sometimes into each other's arms. Once, Stuart Gold stood upon it like a pagan priest while the rest danced wildly around him; then another man brought in a cake with lighted candles and began singing *Happy Birthday* to him.

Haim has good ideas; this work was intriguing. Something about childhood and families and exorcis-

ing old demons was evident, but his exact message was unclear; imprecisely developed. The problem may be that he had too much to say and one concept obscured the other. He did not simplify his themes at this point in his career.

Credit to Juilliard

But the dancers in this work — all (except two) graduates of Juilliard who are an enormous credit to their school and their training — should be heralded with trumpet fanfare. Baba, a perfect Oriental goddess apparently incapable of making an ugly or ungraceful move; the elegant Michael Schumacher (visiting from the Feld Ballet); saucy, elastic Laura Colby; Gold, a powerful stage presence; the pliant and passionate Megan Williams; Haim himself. The others, Raymond Colling and Stephen Norder, work well with the rest despite disparate backgrounds.

Haim's other works were *Fast-Forward* and *Servitude*. Both were too short and suffered from underdevelopment; however, *Fast-Forward*, danced by Colby and four men, was funny and interesting. Haim could yet make something first-rate out of it.

There were lovely dancers, too. In Susan Rose's *Rocks Become Sand*, set to J.S. Bach. This had nice moments when Rose made every one a soloist, contracting or stretching, bending or rising each at his or her own rate. I liked, too, the overall spirit; the dancers touching each other with great care and tenderness. There were pretty lifts, but nothing really special in this choreography — only in the way Deborah Chaester, Lynn Modell, Robert MacArthur, Cheryl Opperman, Kim Manassevit, Carlo Rizzo and Rose herself danced it.

The third choreographer, David Dorfman, gave the New York premiere of his rather gimmicky solo *Keepers*. Face-deadpan, he snuffled out onstage in a bathrobe and



From left, Laura Colby, Stephen Norder and Hikari Baba of Mark Haim & Dancers perform Mark Haim's premiere work *Settings and Clearings* Sunday afternoon on the Riverside Dance Festival's Choreographers' Showcase IV.

John Pappalardo

men with flags, a pall, nested boxes with a bell inside. Dorfman is an engaging performer, but if there was a point to all this I didn't get it. The same was true of his *Barbers*, which he danced with Mickey McLaughlin.

His best by far was his *Drill*, which might be subtitled, "Look, Ma, no hands." Few of us who are not dancers or skaters probably spend much time reflecting on how our hands help us balance. In *Drill*, Dorfman and Don Borch dance with their hands behind them — kicking, running, rolling over, jumping on each other and carrying or being carried. They made it look much easier than it was.

American Ballet Theatre's production of Coppélia was the second

On the Saturday matinee, Martine Van Hamel, one of the few really versatile dancers left in the world today, proved it anew by giving us a Swanilda *par excellence*, young, sassy, extraordinarily light on her feet. Physically, Van Hamel is not a natural for this role, but she is an actress who becomes whoever she wishes. Saturday was one of her best performances I've ever seen, and that is saying much. As Franz, Kevin McKenzie was a last-minute substitute for a back-injured Patrick Bissell.

Enrique Martinez and Michael Owen, both good, alternated as maid Dr. Coppélius. The Act III soloist roles of Aurora and Praver were danced by Christine Spizzo and the exquisite Amanda McKernan on Thursday. Dierdre Carberry and the competent but unexciting Les- lia Robinson Saturday afternoon