

Dance in Review

■ Mother and son, with machine ■ Man and woman, with puppets ■ Urban life and art ■ A choreographic birthday celebration.

Sari Eckler Performance Project

Dia Center for the Arts
155 Mercer Street
SoHo

The Sari Eckler Performance Project presented two pieces by Miss Eckler on Thursday night. Mark Haim, whose work has also been seen in the Joffrey Ballet, was represented as a guest choreographer in a premiere, "May I Please Take Him With Me?"

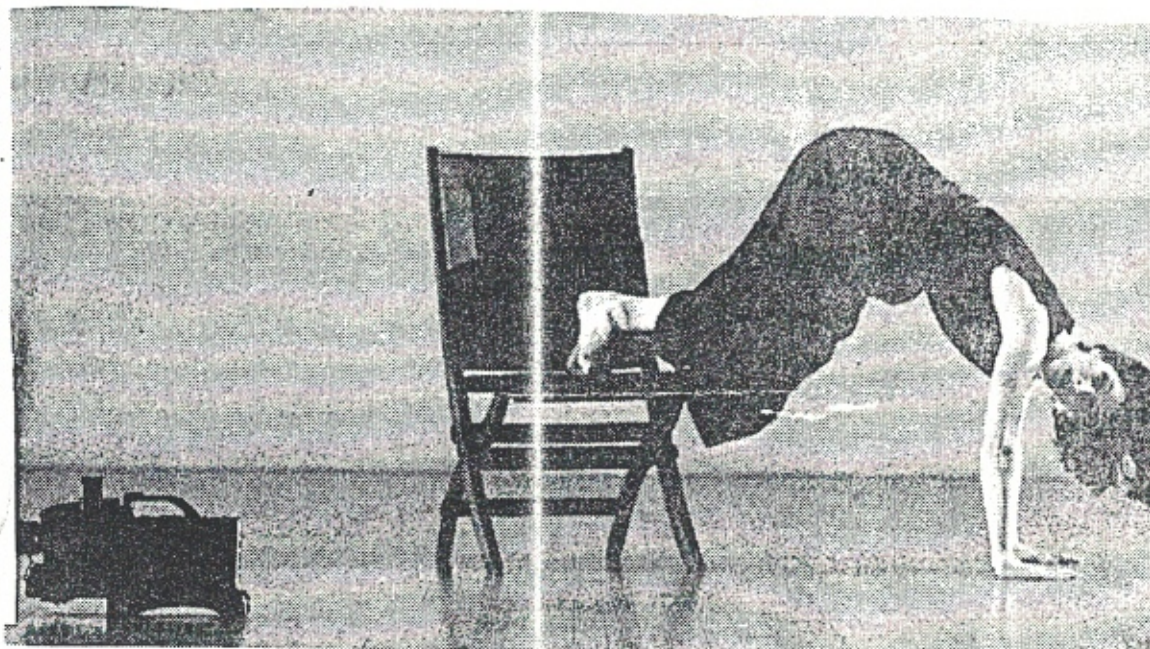
In this solo for Miss Eckler, Mr. Haim seems more oblique about his subject matter than before but no less inventive about how movement should be put together. Miss Eckler is a striking dancer, able to sustain a long phrase without a break while also sharply varying its dynamics. Mr. Haim emphasizes her special gifts in a dance that takes the form of a soliloquy by a mother about her child.

Laura Colby, another dancer, and her 5-year-old son, Colby Marple, are heard on a tape that Miss Eckler plays on a machine. Sometimes Miss Eckler's voice is heard in unison with the mother's repeated remark, "I never said you couldn't have dessert; I said you had to eat your dinner." An entire relationship is summed up in this familiar statement, and its distillation is attempted indirectly in the choreography.

Yet the link between the movement and the voices, sometimes overlaid by a recording of a Corsican polyphonic choir, is too remote, although the movement is powerful and surprising on its own terms. Dressed in a maroon jumpsuit, Miss Eckler begins by propelling herself backward through a series of complicated push-ups. She then whirls around a chair before lying down over the tape recorder. Possibly a surrogate for the child, the machine becomes her focus as the dance, accented by varied falls, becomes even more active.

Miss Eckler is also interested in expressing emotions behind abstract movement, but her new "Remains" had an overload of ideas that the choreography did not sustain. The first section, "What Is Left Over After Use . . .," began with a cleverly structured sparring session between Miss Eckler and Lesley Howes, a boxing instructor. The overall theme reportedly concerned women's defenses against real or imagined fears. Yet the other sections ("To Stay" and "To Continue"), which featured music by Arvo Part, Zbigniew Preisner and Hildegard von Bingen, rarely developed the pure-dance passages into anything beyond images of support and consolation. The cast here included Miss Eckler, Danielle Claro, Michèle Elliman and Megan Williams. There was more dramatic impact in the choreographer's 1991 duet, "XXO," an intense study in adolescent rivalry performed by Miss Eckler and Lisa Marielle Bleyer.

ANNA KISSELGOFF



Sari Eckler in "May I Please Take Him With Me?" at the Dia Center for the Arts in SoHo.