

BULLETIN FROM A MASTER BATTER (T

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VOICE

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through a comically desperate representation (kick, thrash, reach, collapse) of Adu's lovesickness. What is interesting about the dance is that beneath the irony lies its opposite: this really is a picture of female loneliness, and the fact that, off to the right, a timid-looking guy in a necktie is going through the same routine merely hones the edge of the emotion. All the while, the thing is still funny.

Among Tringali's love-lorn punks was Emily Schottland, a thrilling dancer who looks like a messy little kid and who flies into her phrases as if she were vaulting through a jungle gym. On the last "One Night Stand" that I saw (and which, alas, I wasn't reviewing) Schottland presented a wonderful dance of her own, *The Falling Girl*. Like Landis's and Tringali's pieces here, it was a comedy teetering over a pit of sadness. Is this the next wave—bittersweet?

Prisoners of a Single Plane

By Burt Supree

MARK HAIM AND DANCERS. At Theater of the Riverside Church (February 6 to 9). Premiere of *Only If You Dance with Pepe*, also *Front Line* and *Settings and Clearings*, Birgitte Skands's *Un Petit-Pas*.

In his first full-evening concert at Riverside Church, with a fine young company, one-time Juilliard student Mark Haim demonstrated a sharp theatrical sense and skillful control of the stage space. I thought, perhaps presumptuously, that he's got a real show-biz talent—he knows how to get his ideas up on the surface, and how to develop them plainly.

Though he uses gesture with economical power, there's a kind of rhetorical arbitrariness in the overall impulsion of the dances—a sense of willfulness, a grabbing at ideas, a lack of flow. Maybe it

seems odd to complain of lack of flow in a dance as staccato as the military *Front Line* (commissioned in Luxembourg by the Trans Dance Company). It occurs in five sections along a single horizontal plane. The dancers start out in shiny white suits, like a snazzy marching band of toy soldiers (costumes by Ken Yount), walking stiffly, widely apart, across the stage. But after the first moments, anybody that stops gets precisely shoved. When one girl falls, she's simply ignored and stepped over. The "drills" Kevin Weldon performs have a brash snap initially, but become grinding as they continue. He kneels and falls, stands only to fall sideways, pants heavily and does pushups. In a bath of colored lights, four women in short jackets and bikini bottoms display themselves mechanically for two men seated on folding chairs who follow them in. Equally mechanically, the men watch intently, clap, relax, all in unison. It has an appropriately slick and nasty feel.

A woman runs, followed by a man. Another passes through, hunched like a prisoner between two men. Diane Howarth, in a ragged dress, trapped between two men approaching slowly from either side, pleads, offers herself, thrashes, smacks the floor, and cowers. Four women fall over slowly, one at a time; a man drags one body, piles it on another. A woman collapses as he begins to pull up the white tape that has defined the plane of the dance. Their bodies roll forward in front of him as the tape comes up, and halfway through the job he quits, tosses the free end of the tape over the bodies, and leaves.

Front Line is clean, severe, but overly studied. Along with Haim's other dances on the program, it could use some cropping. He enumerates cruelties with cynical elegance, but he's made it all terribly dry. The dance's strictness of design should have amplified the sense of meanness and desperation, but, while the dance contains the shapes of feeling, there's hardly any feeling left in it.

Only If You Dance with Pepe is a suite of five or six dances to Dominican and Puerto Rican merengue music. Sound appetizing, and it can get you jiggling in your seat. But the constant, sassy rhythmic vigor of the songs and their lack of dramatic shape—the qualities which make them so temptingly danceable—hamper the range of the choreography surprisingly. The movement ideas seem few and unconnected; too much stuff is needed to fill out the songs. The most successful is a coyly cynical dance-cartoon with its all-purpose dialogue on placards—but its ethnic joke goes on too long. While Mom is guarding 15-year-old Morena from her boyfriend by means of vigilance and prayer, little sister is out getting pregnant.

Birgitte Skands's *Un Petit-Pas* was smartly funny four-minute tour de force for a dwarf ballerina on a platform dancing Sylphid stuff to a Chopin waltz. Her legs are really the hands of another dancer, hidden behind her, and they, of course, have a perverse mind of their own. But the ballerina rises above the impertinence, and she accepts the audience's homage with aplomb. The practice of ballet teachers who sometimes demonstrate combinations with their hands made the sketch particularly pungent.

Haim's *Settings and Clearings*, premiered last year, was his densest, most satisfying work. Clad in loose, various cut, black outfits, the company stalk around, climbs on top of, and crawls under a high table. They smack it, scrub the surface, lean their heads and elbows upon it in formal configurations while their feet jitter away. In groups the dancers go limp leaning on it, sprawl across run underneath. A woman walks up staircase of bodies onto it; later a man pushes her down and off, another temporary king of the mountain pushes down on that guy's head and rolls him off. The texture becomes more grating and hectic and finally, at high pitch, the dancers run onto and go flying off the table into their companions' arms.