

Sari Eckler Performance Project

At Dia Center for the Arts
April 15 and 16

By Deborah Jowitt

Just when I decide that I don't need to see another dance in which a choreographer relives childhood, something interesting in this vein turns up. There's nothing unusual about the rivalry between two girls in Sari Eckler's *XXO*, but I like the single-minded ingenuity of their cruel games and the taken-for-granted friendship underneath. Eckler, taller and harsher, is often the winner in a killer version of rock-scissors-paper. But Lisa Marielle Bleyer—curly hair, big eyes, and innocent eagerness aside—gets in a lot of low blows. Worried by an offhand speech by Eckler about how parents often lose interest in their children, bested in an unfair multiplication test, she then lords it over Eckler in a game of "horsey." I remember being this kind of "best friends": You pinch hard and say awful things, but always sign your letters with rows of X's and O's.

Eckler is a beautiful woman with a fashion model's bones and cool. It bothers me a little that she often looks cross or strained, especially when speaking, as if too anxious to get her feelings across. Because of her potential elegance, I like the fact that Mark Haim makes her look gawky in *Please*

Dance

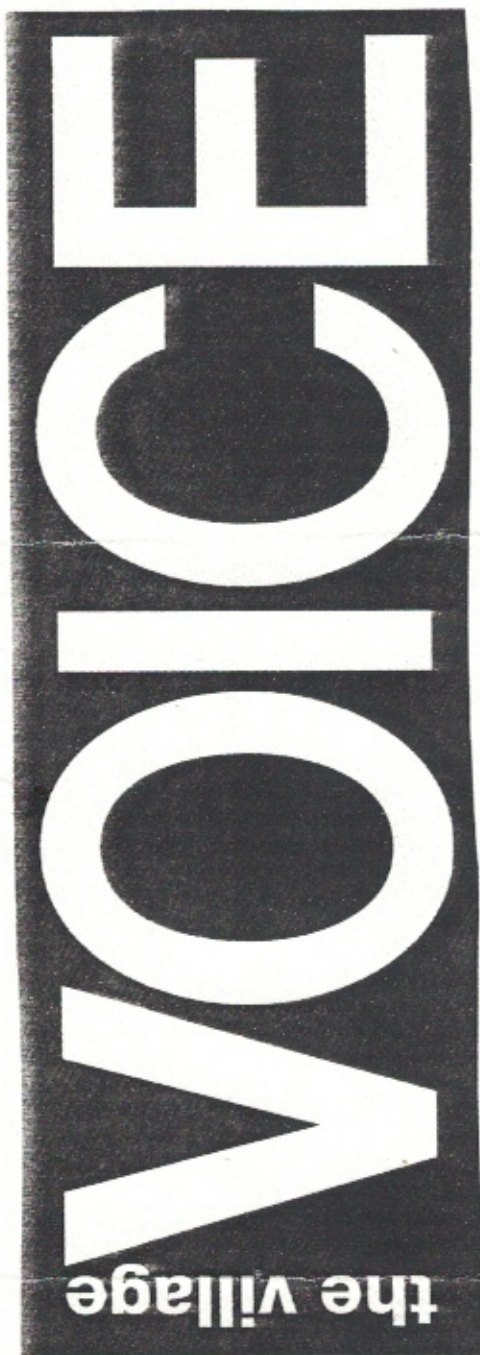
May I Take Him With Me? She begins by hitching herself around in a circle on the floor: once seated on a chair, she topples repeatedly halfway off it, as if she were trying to operate the video camera on the floor beside her with her forehead, or peer through it. A fuzzy tape plays: we hear a woman and a child facing each other down, the woman saying intermittently, "I never said you couldn't have dessert; I said you had to eat your dinner," her voice as high and pained as her kid's. Eckler's

movement reflects the awkwardness, the strain of the voices. By the end, she's tipped the camcorder over between her legs, freed herself from it, and, bent over, begun to turn endlessly. Interesting. Inscrutable.

As Eckler's *remains* begins, she (substituting for Bleyer) is recounting a somehow upsetting story (or dream), while Lesley Howes wraps her hands in red tape. Howes, who really does assist in boxing classes, coaches Eckler through maneuvers. Her voice is low and matter-of-fact as she gives directions and stops or guides the punches that Eckler, grim-faced, delivers. I love the realness of this scene. Later, when Eckler coaches one of the other women, she acts the part, and the encounter isn't nearly as engrossing.

remains is interesting, even though Eckler's three definitions of the title (what is left over after use; to stay; to continue) don't appear to guide the choreography. What we get are women responding to fragmentary, disturbing, perhaps imagined threats—from people, from disease, from inner demons. Megan Williams and Michelle Elman, later Eckler and Danielle Claro, stalk across the space, leaning back, staring at us; they look like exaggerated drawings of fashion models, but they're also on guard.

While the music shifts from an unearthly voice singing Hildegard of Bingen's ancient chant to music by Arvo Part and Zbigniew Preisner, the four women dance vigorously—twisty, stumpy stuff. From time to time, they press themselves softly against the back wall as if searching for an opening. Claro seems in need of healing, and Williams picks her up, holds her. They line up like starters at a race, but can't get going. At the end, all four punch the air while the trainer eyes them. There's something engrossing about all this, although Eckler's ideas occasionally slip off the choreography so we hear what she's trying to tell us dimly, like a voice that trails away before all the words are out. ■



May 4, 1993 • Vol. XXXVIII