

On With the Show!

An Air Copy from WLFR-FM

91.7 on the dial



and
Enjoying the Arts



SOME GOOD MOVES IN SOHO

Devotees of the contemporary performance art scene need only to look around SOHO to find performance spaces peppered among the many galleries and exhibit centers. In fact, just half a block from the Guggenheim Museum is the thriving Dia Center for the Arts, 155 Mercer Street. With its curbleless sidewalk out front and large doorlike, multi-paneled facade, Dia immediately gives itself away as a converted garage. All to the good. With motor vehicles no longer moving in and out, the space is now set aside for far more interesting vehicles, the vehicles created for expressive dancers, pantomimists and sundry theatrical artists.

We dropped by on Friday evening, April 16th to catch the Sari Eckler Performance Project on the second of two nights of presentation. Ms. Eckler, who has danced with Nina Wiener, Lucinda Childs, David Gordon and others, has become a choreographer in her own right and one to keep an eye on. Two of her creations, *XXO* and *remains*, the latter in its premiere performance, sandwiched Mark Haim's *May I Please Take Him With Me?* These works together were apparently carefully programmed to comprise three sequential tableaux of women's themes.

We are totally unfamiliar with her work and have absolutely no idea whether expressions by, for and about women constitute a singular theme for Eckler. Looking about the audience of about 80 strong, one could not find many more women than men on hand. So one may ask if any particular devotion to women's themes is what attracts her following. Are audiences persuaded by her uncompromising form and technique? Or is it that Eckler's work is imaginatively fertile and sometimes profoundly emotional? Every step does appear to have a meaning which, no doubt, contributes to the whole. Especially in *remains*, the final work calling for five female performers, were the actions pregnant with intense feelings about life, death, mourning, the need for each other and, perhaps, feelings themselves. Very impressive, too, was the fine ensemble work displayed by the four dancers. The fifth performer acts as a boxing coach, the idea of boxing serving, perhaps, as a metaphor of life and the need to go on. Note that we used the word perhaps twice, for this kind of theatre is inevitably subject to much individual interpretation and questioning.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

TONY PETTOLINA....39 NOSTRAND DRIVE....TOM'S RIVER, NJ 08757

In the opening *XXO* Eckler and Lisa Marielle Bleyer pantomime (with a few mutterings) the wavering friendship of two young girls over the years. As such, this piece, while no less enigmatic than *remains*, seems less structured. Acrobatics here supplant anything like traditional dance movements, and there is no accompanying music. The actions are bare and deceptively simple. There seems to be some kind of ritualistic competition going on. What does the title mean, that childhood is one long game of tic-tac-toe? Or might a man ask, "Are there girlish secrets here that are going over my head?" He might also feel he has been invited, as a kind of joke, into the women's room where he doesn't belong until, that is, he realizes the second work on the program was created by a man. In Mark Haim's *May I Please Take Him With Me?* Eckler has a chance to show what she can do as a soloist. Interestingly, like Samuel Becket's landmark *Krapp's Last Tape* and other experimental theatre pieces, the Haim-Eckler work uses a tape recorder as a second character, in this case, the voice of a child. Here we have an often funny dialogue between mother and daughter. But it is not a dance dialogue. For most of the way the movements of the lone dancer portray some very serious conflict and tumult. Yet it ends peacefully with an imaginary baby in her arms and with soft music heard in the background, the last of some engrossing Corsican Chants Polyphoniques.

The text used in that piece was written by Laura Colby and Colby Marple. Bleyer and Eckler created the lines used in the final work. *remains* was performed by Eckler (subbing for Bleyer at, apparently, the last moment), Danielle Claro, Michele Elliman, Megan Williams and Lesley Howes as the boxing coach (which she is in real life -- no kidding!) Costumes were designed by Eileen Thomas and lighting by Kristabelle Munson. Music by Hildegard von Bingen, Arvo Part and Zbigniew Preisner were used in *remains*.

If one sees many enigmatic elements in her creative arsenal, that is not to challenge the validity of Ms. Eckler's still developing art. We should always remember that the makings of great masters are not in the answers they provide but rather in the questions they pose? And if this is what attracts audiences to Sari Eckler, then it speaks well for the discernment and intelligence of audiences today. -- Barry L. Cohen for *Enjoying the Arts*

