

DEMOCRACY

It was a democratic evening of dance at Judson Memorial Church on July 6. There were 14 choreographers and 17 performers. There should have been something for everybody, including a nap if desired; and in fact there was so much that special moments arose as expected and at least three dances provoked a big response from everybody.

I like Fred Herko's "Once or Twice a Week I Put on Sneakers and Go Uptown." Herko did a barefoot Susie-Q in a tassel-veil headdress, moving around the big open performing area (no stage at the church) in a semicircle, doing only the barefoot Susie-Q with sometimes a lazy arm snaking up and collapsing down.

Business at Hand

John Herbert McDowell is a composer. He has no dance training. He made a dance called "February Fun at Bucharest." Having no tics or tensions arising from a training and having an inordinate sense of fun, McDowell distinguishes himself as a "natural"--not a natural dancer (although you could think of it that way if you're not too set in your idea of what dancing is); I mean a natural person going about the business at hand, which in this case consisted of a few zany actions performed in a red sock and a yellow sweater.

Ruth Emerson is a tall, imposing woman who makes simple, direct, clean movement and occasionally ruins it with a gesture that doesn't look like hers. If the gesture turns up by chance it must be a problem to internalize it. Chance procedures (which predominated in this program) are useful in many ways and usually produce novel results, but in the end the only thing that matters is who is doing what. Chance procedures are preliminary controls; the chance results are subjected to the control of performance and that means you always end up with a person expressing himself. Movement is not like sound in that respect. Movement is the person. The material and the person are One.

David Gordon, for instance. For my free time David Gordon did two extraordinary dances on that program. He did some movement nobody ever saw before. Like the body bent off center, the head awkwardly strained back, the elbows squeezed into the ribs as the flattened hands and forearms made the painful beauty of spastic helplessness. As though the body were straining, yelling, against an involuntary violence. Molloy and Malone should be so lucky.

After the Draught

William Davis came in with dance No. 13, "Crayon," to some jazz. Dee Clark, the Shells, and the audience went crazy for a minute because of the dry spell that came before. I think the audience was glad enough to see Davis, too. He's a finely proportioned dancer who performs with quiet, clean, unassuming strength. And the dance was a good one. I only wish he had let loose, just once anyway.

Not that it mattered so much. And then Yvonne Rainer came on with "Ordinary Dance." It is an ordinary dance because it is autobiographical and Miss Rainer does a lot of talking while she moves, ordinary-type talking, telling you the facts (Hugo St. ... oh yes I forgot to mention Gilroy

the two wheel cart that moved the earth ... 1941-1942 ... let's see ... uh ... panhandle, early morning, white ... I'm really not telling you much am I ...). Poetry of facts. The title has its ironic aspect. The dance is out of the ordinary. Like Gordon she did some movement nobody ever saw before. I can't say any more now except to note that the audience responded tumultuously and we had good reason.

Also on the program, and not discussed for reasons of space, were dances by Steve Paxton, Elaine Summers, Carol Scothorn, Gretchen MacLane, and Deborah Hay. I didn't mention that this was an important program in bringing together a number of young talents who stand apart from the past and who could make the present of modern dance more exciting than it's been for twenty years (except for an individual here and there who always makes it regardless of the general inertia). Almost all of these dancers and choreographers were in Robert Dunn's composition class at the Living Theatre.

--Jill Johnston

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