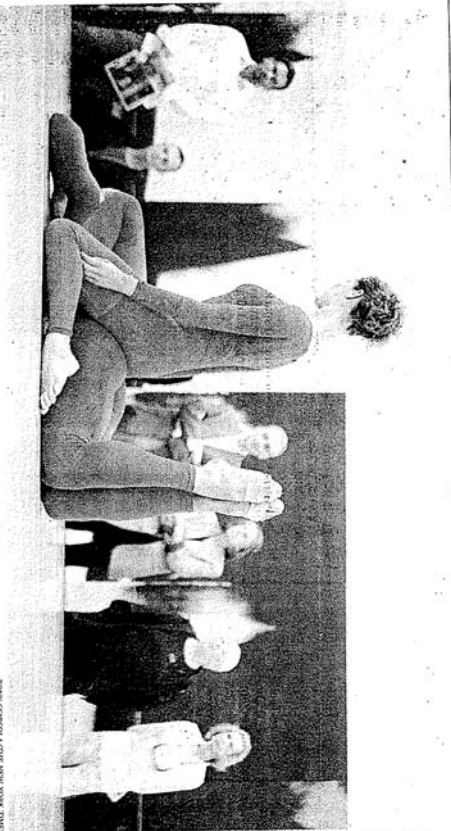


MONDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2007



Members of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Dia:Beacon, where Cunningham Events were staged over the weekend.

One Stage for Each Eye, and Plenty for the Ears Too

BEACON, N.Y., Sept. 29 — Paul Valéry wrote in "L'Amor et la Danse" (1921) that the essence of dance lay in metamorphosis, that what dance shows is the constant change of one physical image into another. His point works for all dance, but to no choreographer can it apply more fully than Merce Cunningham, whose is the original condition of his dance theater and not just of one image, shape or rhythm into another.

In his Events this weekend at Dia:Beacon here, the Cunningham dancers performed on two square, raised stages connected at one corner. In two brief episodes Saturday the split-focus spectacle was of simultaneous solos, one on each stage, and if you tried to keep an eye on a similar or different one, you would see different things. When Rashidun Mitchell and Daniel Miodoff (opposite in looks), on separate stages, performed briskly step-laden and multidirectional new solos from Mr. Cunningham's forthcoming "COVER" (which has its premiere on Friday at Dartmouth College), the fun lay in how nearly identical their material was, although there were fractional differences in timing and drastic differences in mood. When Holly Farmer, an intense redhead, was asked to twinkle blonde, on the other, their solos

were altogether unlike, but a harmony — like left and right hands of the same piano part — developed nonetheless.

Yet Mr. Cunningham, like a filmmaker cutting to a new score, promptly replaced solists with others. You singled out Mr. Mitchell as a star because of the lyrical fluency with which he tackled the off-balance challenges of one dance, only to notice him in the back row of a soccer-mason group later. Nothing was con-

stant but change. The coolly alert Koji Mizuta lowered Ms. Farmer into a diagonal line, her face and chest addressing the floor for a long while. This looked dramatically suspended, and you wondered what would happen next, but it wasn't anything you could have predicted. He raised her back to standing, ran across to the other stage and joined a company of seven other dancers (including Alvin Ailey) who wrote a part of days, "Honor" and "Garden," to be performed simultaneously in adjacent theaters, with the same characters in the same day adding up to quite dif-

ferent plays and the actors rushing from their exits in theater to their entrances in another. In some of the plotless dance equity, alert and you have an idea of these Dia:Beacon Events. True, audience members could position themselves to watch both stages at the same time, but the left-right/foreground-background contrast was such that nobody could concentrate on both consistently.

The setting was one of the spacious Riggo Galleries, and on Saturday afternoon the minimalist overhead light and speaker arrangement. The possessions, by Anna Pitlor, in shades of russet, dramatized the colors in the surrounding suite of paintings on the gallery's white walls. The musicians — David Behrman, John King, Takekoshi Koseigi and Christian Wolff — created a polyphonic aural environment in which sound itself traveled around the space.

Any Cunningham Event is an anthology of dance from repertoire made over the decades. I presume that Mr. Cunningham enjoys arranging the material so able to identify it all without private information. On Saturday I found myself ravished by a diet for Lisa Boudreau and Brandon Calvès that seemed wholly new to me until I realized I had seen

and admitted it many times in Mr. Cunningham's magnum opus, "Interchange" (2000), and danced with Ms. Boudreau. The difference was that she was now speaking, and near at hand, so I spotted a fresh wealth of luxurious slow descents from half-toe to flat foot and the lasciviously gradual archings-back of her head and upper spine before she allowed herself to fall back into Mr. Calvès's arms.

This was an inaugural performance of what is being called MDC's Hudson Valley Project, and it was dedicated to Harvey Leichtenstein and Benedicte Pelegrin, figures whose ardent promotion of work by Mr. Cunningham and other artists began in the 1960s. (The Merce Cunningham Dance Company is expected to perform a series of further Events at Dia:Beacon during the next few years.)

I write this before attending the second performance, on Sunday, at which I am sure to see much I missed the first time. "My spirit impels me to speak of bodies changed into new forms" are the words with which Ovid starts his "Metamorphoses," a good motto for all dance-goers and for Cunningham-viewers in particular. You have to be there at the moment to enjoy what's before your eyes, knowing that in the next it will have been replaced by something else.

A lively invitation to compare and contrast.

Merce Cunningham
Dia:Beacon

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