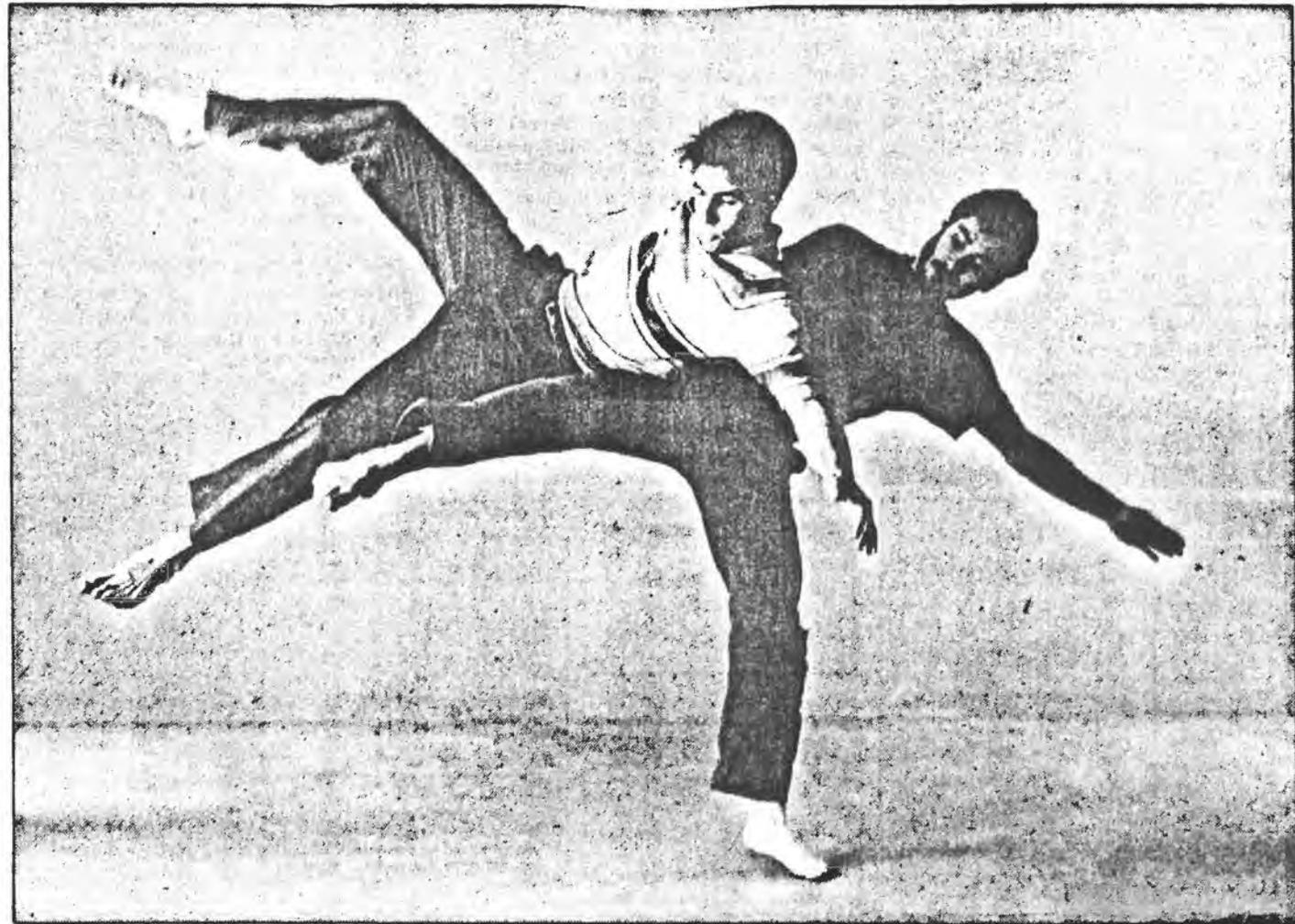


By Burt Supree

**JUDSON DANCE THEATER RE-CONSTRUCTIONS.** At Danspace at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery (April 15 and 16). Elaine Summers's *Dance for Lots of People*, Judith Dunn's *Dewhorse*, Edward Bartonn's *Pop 1* and *Pop 2*, Remy Charlip's *Meditation*, Simone Forti's *Slant Board*, Brian dePalma's film *Wotan's Wake*, Philip Corner's *Keyboard Dances and Flares*, Yvonne Rainer's *The Mind Is a Muscle, Part 1*, or *Trio A*.

It seemed to be a holiday, or at least a sort of class reunion, at St. Mark's in-the-Bowery's restored sanctuary the opening night of the Judson Dance Theater reconstructions. Amazing how strongly some of the work holds up.

Elaine Summers's *Dance for Lots of People* was very much of its time, the '60s, with its optimistic use of people in the mass working together with a naive and clumsy beauty. But the piece is still effective. An endless stream of chattering people enter from behind the audience—how many? 30? 40?—and make a really big clump in the space. They're a tight bunch, pushing, shifting, with the people on the edge trying to stay part of the mass as the small movements of the others tend to push them out: it's a constant effort of reintegration. (Their efforts are not far from the more labored and stressful struggle of the three people in Simone Forti's 1961 *Slant Board*—done during intermission—to clamber around on a platform tilted 45 degrees from the floor. The crudenesses and adjustments are essential to the texture. And in *Slant Board*, the task is all there is.) Someone is lifted up, held aloft, then disappears, and two more people are lifted. They too sink back, like folding-up Vs, going down hips first. Lots of noise from the group. Two more people are lifted, then arch back into the mass headfirst. A few soloists emerge and what



Stephen Petronio and Randy Warshaw in Paxton's *Jag Ville Gorna Telefonera*.

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they do is more dancier. A woman whirls around. But the group remains focal. When everyone reaches out, the group looks like a sea anemone waving its tentacles. Everyone bounces, then scatters with a thunder of feet, and falls. The first soloist remains. One man swings his arms, slides, and rolls. Another does abrupt zigzagging runs through the littered bodies. The group begins to rise, and almost congeals, but slowly returns to the floor instead. The people hardly ever shut up. They bounce and jiggle, hook themselves into a chain that pulls into huge serpentine loops, faster and rougher.

The general effect is grand. The stiffness and staginess of individuals becomes submerged in the main statement, just as the remarks everyone makes during the piece assert their individuality in some measure, but are neutralized in the total sound. The group is convincing and serious, and the energy of the mass is compelling.

Judith Dunn and Bill Dixon's *Dewhorse* was a kind of tough, meditative revelation. *Dewhorse* is a duet in long, alternating solo sections—for Dixon on trumpet, and Cheryl Lilienstein in Dunn's part—which eventually draw together. It ends when she comes beside him. Lilienstein looks astonishingly like Dunn did, but she reveals a vibrant inner life in the dance that Dunn undercut. Dunn could be very ethereal or sensual through the upper body and arms, and much more matter-of-fact in the way she used her legs, but most of the dancing she did in her own works was overlaid by a sternness and tension that came across as her primary message. Lilienstein was luminous.

Dixon is first, with rhythmic cries on his horn, fading to wheezes and whispers. Lilienstein comes on holding a stuffed white pigeon in her mouth. She walks around, makes soft, sideways flip-flopping hand movements. Some of these movements become part of a recurring routine. There's a deadpan quality that can be

funny or puzzling or frightening: Lilienstein doesn't force it. The body is often broad and foursquare, composed, while there's great concentration in the hands curling or toes pulling tenaciously against the floor. Occasionally, there will be a blurt of strong, leggy jumps, or more sweeping stretches and bends. Or Lilienstein will lean back, as if to say, perhaps warily, "Look at me!" Something very intimate about the feeling of all this. Lilienstein lies sideways, and leaves the pigeon on the floor nearby. She's clear and very firm: even lying on the floor she surrenders nothing to it. In a bit, she sits up and stares away. Dixon comes out to play soft, short phrases. You're free to feel the connections between the divided dance and music.

Lilienstein edges forward, shakes an upraised arm, flings it precisely. From her mouth, a small red bird dangles on a string. Standing, she makes soft, rocking motions. Now she moves with more force, decisiveness, and resistance: like when she thrusts her hands downward thickly, then opens them. And bigger moves have a hard, sculpted quality, but not a forbidding one—it's as if the dancer were simply taking great care of herself.

Dixon's trumpet makes more ecstatic babblings and whistles next time, and is frantic by the last, when Lilienstein's sudden proximity drops them both into silence and stillness.

Forget Brian dePalma's silly film *Wotan's Wake*. Edward Bhattonn's *Pop 1* and *Pop 2* just took a minute, and added the proper touch of frivolity to the evening. With stagey charm, Bhattonn in a red leotard blows up a yellow balloon, sets it on a blue mat, and does a flip to burst it. Nowadays, plenty of people have developed their acrobatic skills, but downtown, in the '60s, Bhattonn, walking on his hands, was a rare bird.

In *Flares*, Philip Corner's whizzing, intermittent (sometimes Cowell-esque) music played as, one at a time, slides floated around the walls, ceiling, and altar of the church: one dark, scratchy slide was rather effective on corners. I enjoyed the patient

predictability and the increasing density of Corner's slightly tedious *Keyboard Dances*. After carefully taking off shoes and socks, Corner slowly lifts a foot to the piano keyboard and makes a glunk of sound. Then both feet. Then, very precisely, the nose. Socks and shoes go back on, and smoothing his wild hair, Corner plays mournful, climbing masses of notes. Presses his palms on the keyboard, his elbows, forearms, till he can mash sound from the entire keyboard at once.

Remy Charlip's been doing *Meditation* on and off since he made it in 1966. And the dance has changed with him. At St. Mark's, Charlip attacked the piece very broadly. *Meditation* hardly moves in space. It is the dance of a man barely holding himself together. Horrors and terrors and rages well out of him, and bend and constrict and topple and decompose the simple, secure gestures and patterns of the dance: his hands twitch, his body shrinks and trembles violently, his whole face seems to melt off the bones. It's a very personal, emotional work, and shocking too, by virtue of its strange, maybe unwelcome, intimacy. But it can be quite funny. Of course, the cornball music from *Thais* sets you up for a joke. Doing the piece used to leave Charlip unstrung. The first time he did it in public, in 1967, at the Angry Arts concert against the Vietnam War, the audience laughed and he was devastated. The piece was relatively new then, and it was doing him.

Part of what makes *Meditation* powerful is that the things that happen to Charlip, like the trembling, do really seem to possess him. They never seem to be under his control. For a moment he takes command, there's a clarity and confidence; a moment later that's stripped off. The dance has changed in many small ways, and it has acquired a short, conciliatory coda. A few of the gestures are altogether different, many are stronger and less ambivalent. In one of the first moments of the dance, Charlip used to set his arm at an angle in the air in a gesture that seemed partly to insist on restraint and partly to

salute. Now a sharper gesture says, "Hold it!"

The evening ended with Yvonne Rainer doing her *Trio A* (1966), whose unstressed flow of movement nonequivalently forcibly caught people's imaginations. You can't tell the transitions from the climaxes. Everything's pretty equal, the rhythms comfortably flexible; even ballet dancers and untrained people were invited to perform it. Now, Rainer—having not done the piece at all for about eight months—almost qualifies as an untrained person. It was wonderful to see her in it. She has always been a riveting performer, with her long torso, her straight dark hair setting off her face with its characteristic wondering sweetness, and an odd, wry humor that isn't exactly funny and probably isn't humor: her presence just skews the world. Rainer looked good, but the dance was troublesome for her. It seemed slowed down and interrupted, and I enjoyed the qualities that the fragmentation reinforced.

*Trio A* is a dance of swings and wobbles, curious personal gestures, surprising isolations, and difficult coordinations. The gaze is averted. The piece bounces along cool and pedestrian on low-to-the-ground legwork that slips and bumps into squats, headrolls, somersaults, and almost acrobatic stuff that maybe she was going to do but changed her mind. Traditional dance movements are welded to the commonplace. Many of the moves are awkward, indulgent, or downright goofy, like wide steps taken with the legs lifting through second as the arms rotate and wobble the body. But the flow of it all satisfies by subverting expectations, deflecting movements from completion, not quite accomplishing anything. It's filled with options, with the "beautiful," the gross, and the defective. It doesn't celebrate awkwardness, doesn't say, "Clumsy Is Beautiful." But it includes them in the lexicon of things that are interesting to look at in themselves, and pleasurable to do. The upshot is beautiful, even healing. ■