

Nothing is more calculated to make one feel one's age than to realize that a time one lived through—that still has to oneself the immediacy of the present—has become a period of history. I remember the shock it gave me when a young person said to me, "Oh, I wish I'd lived through the thirties," but nowadays a decade doesn't have to be that remote to be considered historic. It's partly to do with the all-consuming present-day appetite for nostalgia, but on a more serious level it has to do with people's need to find their roots.

This has been especially true in dance in recent years; dance history must be one of the fastest-growing scholarly disciplines. As we become aware of how difficult it is to reconstruct, even to form an idea of, the dances of past centuries, we have realized the urgency of preserving records of those of our own—it is only in the last few years that the dance audience at large has been given opportunities to see reconstructions of the works of modern dance pioneers like Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis.

Now, a much more recent period has come under the intensive scrutiny of dance historians—recent enough for the project to be undertaken with the cooperation of some of the participants. The period is the early sixties, when the Judson Dance Theater initiated what has come to be known, for better or worse, as the post-modern movement. The proper study of dance history must take place in two areas, documentation and, whenever possible, performance. The Judson Project organized by Tony Carruthers

and Wendy Perron at Bennington College in the spring of 1980, whose end results were visible in New York this winter and spring, tried to fulfill these requirements. There was an exhibition, **Judson Dance Theater: 1962-1966**, at the Grey Art Gallery, New York University, January 11-February 13, and two programs of **Judson Dance Theater Reconstructions**, the inaugural performances at the handsomely restored Danspace at St. Mark's Church, April 15-18.

The exhibition included photographs, programs, and flyers; choreographic notes and notations; videotapes of interviews with various participants; and of some performance reconstructions, available on request. There is, of course, no lack of written material on the subject of Judson, including some of the choreographers' own published notes, Jill Johnston's and Don McDonagh's contemporary reviews and accounts, the *Ballet Review* issue (Vol. 1, No. 6, 1967) devoted to the subject, with its indispensable chronology, and Sally Banes's more recent studies; to these are now added the two catalogue essays—a further chapter of autobiography by Johnston, and an excellent brief history by Banes.

There are plenty of people around who were involved in the Judson performances or attended them. The photographs in the exhibition and its catalogue, however, were chosen by people who never saw any of the performances at Judson Church and elsewhere, on the basis of the impact the images had on them. It happens that many of the pictures so chosen record some of the most memorable events: Yvonne Rainer's "screaming fit in a pile of white tulle" (Sally Banes's description) from *Three Seascapes*; Robert Morris's *Site*, with its *tableau vivant* of Manet's *Olympia* voluptuously personified by Carolee Schneemann; Valda Setterfield's exquisite, chaste striptease in her husband, David Gordon's *Random Breakfast*; Alex Hay's balancing act in *Prairie* (where a voice on tape asked him, "Are you quite comfortable?"); Carolyn Brown, once described by Gordon as the "prima modernina," on pointe, partnered by Robert Rauschenberg and Hay, with parachutes attached to their backs, in Rauschenberg's *Pelican*; James Waring's soberly hilarious *Tambourine Dance*; Al Carmines's marvelous setting of Gertrude Stein's *What Happened*, sung and danced by such Judson stars (that's what they were, whether they like it or not) as Lucinda Childs, Aileen Passloff, Yvonne Rainer, and the late Arlene Rothlein—these, anyway, are among the things that I remember most vividly. Another unforgettable Judson star was Fred Herko; Peter Moore's ghostly photograph of him in *Dervish* was one of the most haunting images in the show (Freddie was dead less than a year after it was taken).

If I may be permitted an autobiographical aside of my own, my involvement in Judson was marginal: I was secretary of the Cunningham Studio at the time of Robert Dunn's composition course, out of which the whole thing started; I performed in several of Jimmy Waring's pieces and in Al Carmines's musicals, at Judson and elsewhere, and also danced a duet of my own, a take-off on the Bolshoi, in a Judson benefit series, with Marian Sarach.

Judson Church, which gave this movement its name, was the ideal venue, not only

because its sanctuary, or meeting room, offered a large, uncluttered, flexible space but also because the Church was deeply involved in the social, political, and artistic issues of the sixties. Such concerns were implicit in much of the work of the Dance Theater. Although the Judson choreographers were deeply influenced by the Cunningham-Cage aesthetic, even acknowledged the fact, they carried such elements as the use of chance and indeterminacy, of nondance movement, of unorthodox structures, much further than Cunningham at any rate was prepared to. Even if he wished to free his work, through the use of chance procedures, from the limitations of his own habits and imagination, he still remained in control of the end product—chance was a compositional tool and any improvisatory element in performance was strictly limited to a certain freedom of choice among given choreographic materials. The Judson choreographers rejected this hegemony as they rejected the theatricality and virtuosity that Cunningham never relinquished.

The first Judson concert took place on July 6, 1962; the terminal date of 1966 was chosen by the curators of the exhibit because on April 5 of that year a "second generation" emerged when Kenneth King, Meredith Monk, and Phoebe Neville gave a concert there; in October, Twyla Tharp gave one, and of course dance concerts continued to happen at Judson for many years. The Judson Dance Theater Reconstructions in April included several works that would have to be classified, according to the exhibit's premise, as pre- or post-Judson, but their inclusion was amply justified.

The earliest was James Waring's *Octandre*, to the music of Edgard Varèse, made for Aileen Passloff in 1957 and reconstructed and performed by her. Waring was not strictly a member of the Judson group, but he was certainly one of its gurus—Childs, Gordon, Deborah Hay, Herko, Passloff, Rainer, and Setterfield all danced in his company at various times and his composition classes in the late fifties were as innovative and influential as Bob Dunn's. He also put on concerts of work by his students at the Living Theater that prefigured those at Judson Church. *Octandre*, with its cabalistic pointing gestures and indefinable air of menace, was a product of the sinister side of his imagination, and I can't believe that Passloff did it any more powerfully twenty-five years ago.

Her own solo *Structures*, a chance piece, dates from 1960 and shows that she was able to absorb Waring's influence and transmute it into something of her own; the inconsequent gestures, held tightly into the space around her body, and the moving, indeed living decor (a concealed person producing props from a trunk that was pulled across the stage in back of her) were very Waringesque. The truth is, though, that Passloff influenced Waring, too—she was and still is exactly the kind of contained, concentrated performer that his dances required. One of the most moving things in these concerts, by the way, was the sequence of Jimmy teaching one of his idiosyncratic ballet classes in Elaine Summers's film *Judson Nights*.

It is ironic, of course, given the fact that impermanence was a fundamental premise of the Judson aesthetic, that certain works

have attained the status of classics, at least by reputation. Chief among these is Rainer's *The Mind Is a Muscle*, Part I, or *Trio A*, which Rainer herself performed at St. Mark's. As at the first performance in 1966 (by Rainer with Steve Paxton and David Gordon), it was done twice. The long (four-and-a-half minute), complex "phrase" is meant to be done with as little "performance" quality as possible, everything given equal weight and emphasis, even the recognizable dance steps executed as though they were ordinary movements. On the first night, Rainer, by her own admission out of practice, was noticeably more secure in the repeat; if one definition of virtuosity is the ability to hold an audience spellbound with an apparent minimum of effort, then Rainer is a virtuoso, even if she rejects the appellation.

Lucinda Childs's *Carnation* (1964) is a kind of one-woman Happening, in which she places a wire salad basket on her head and with the utmost gravity inserts hair curlers into its petals, then pulls them out again and puts them between a number of household sponges held in her mouth; later she does a handstand against a vertical board, then runs and jumps onto a plastic bag and stands on it making faces. There is no dance movement as such. Superficially it's quite different from her present work, yet both involve the compulsive completion of all the components of a structure.

Judith Dunn's *Dewhorse* was lovingly reconstructed and performed by Cheryl Lillenstein with Dunn's original musical collaborator Bill Dixon (and watched by the choreographer, tragically incapacitated since 1976 by a brain tumor). Both dance and music have the same quality of strength combined with delicacy; this choreography, moreover, carefully defines and develops its themes—Louis Horst himself might have recognized one section as a *rondo*.

Elaine Summers's *Dance for Lots of People*, too, clearly had a beginning, a middle, and an end, even though it exemplifies the Judson premise that not only could nondance movement be used, it could be done by nondancers, of all shapes and sizes.

Steve Paxton's *Jag Ville Gorna Telefonera*, based on a picture score (a collage of sport pictures), originally performed by him

with Rauschenberg in Stockholm, was beautifully done by Stephen Petronio and Randy Warshaw; it is clear that contact improvisation, the form that Paxton initiated, evolved out of this kind of work, in which the performers entrust their weight to one another as they tumble and spill to the floor.

Two other Judson founding members contributed "task" pieces (in which the performers obey instructions rather than repeating learned movements): Simone Forti's *Slant Board* (one of her "Five Dance Constructions" from 1961), in which three people climb on a tilted board using knotted ropes—someone said, "Oh, it's just like Elizabeth Streb," but of course Streb's work is meticulously plotted and this was free; and Deborah Hay's *Ten*, in which that number of people assume a variety of positions around some horizontal and vertical poles, for a very long time.

Light relief was provided by Edward Bhatt's *Pop 1 and 2*, two ways to burst a balloon by landing on it out of a back somersault, and, for some members of the audience, by Remy Charlip's *Meditation*, another classic, though for me this sequence of grimaces and gestures fulfills the definition of tragedy ("purging the soul by pity and terror") rather than comedy.

The contributions of musicians, visual artists, and filmmakers were represented by, respectively, two pieces by Philip Corner, in one of which he managed to play all the notes on a piano at once, Carolée Schneemann's *Lateral Splay*, whose performers careen and collide all over the space, and Brian De Palma's *Woton's Wake*, which reminded us that Judson audiences would sometimes put up with anything.

It was not possible, of course, in two programs to do more than offer a cursory survey of Judson history. Apart from the restriction of time, the organizers, Wendy Perron and Cynthia Hedstrom, artistic director of Danspace, were limited by what was available. Of the original Judson choreographers, Trisha Brown and David Gordon were especially missed. But there was enough to make the important point that Judson Dance Theater, though regarded in some quarters as being impossibly far out at the time, was in fact part of the continuum that is dance history; it opened up new possibilities for dancing that choreographers are still continuing to explore.

DAVID VAUGHAN