

High art comes to Horseneck as trio performs 'Site Dance'

By Robert Lovinger
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WESTPORT — Susan Sgorbati's stages have included museums, a frozen lake, an archaeological dig, a church and a marble quarry. Saturday, she and her troupe were dancing on Horseneck Beach.

Two performances of abstract dance and music left behind only footprints in the sand and mind's-eye visions of ephemeral art set against a spectacular ocean backdrop.

Ms. Sgorbati calls it a "Site Dance." The dozen or so spectators at the 8 a.m. performance weren't sure what to call it, but they were impressed.

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For a while it looked as though the morning performance wouldn't take place. Light rain had turned the parking lot slick and the sand brown. Now and then, thunder rolled out of the east.

Vermont-based choreographer and dancer Sgorbati, two other dancers, musicians, friends and a handful of spectators milled around in the chilly mist waiting for the weather to commit itself. Some of those on hand had driven through the pre-dawn hours from northern New England and Philadelphia.

Then, like theater lobby lights flickering to signal the start of a performance, a clap of thunder — the last of the morning — seemed to move the dancers and musicians toward the shoreline and the beginning of the performance.

Already mounted in the sand at the water's edge was a 7-foot-high wood sculpture created by artist Ron Rud-

nicki of Hillman Street, New Bedford, especially for this performance. Standing alone on the beach, the 5-piece vertical sculpture resembled the monoliths planted by aliens in the film, "2001: A Space Odyssey."

Like Rudnicki's unnamed sculpture — "I don't title stuff," he said — the performance was simply the latest in a series of Site Dances created and organized by Ms. Sgorbati, a fellow in choreography at Bennington College and a dance instructor at Castleton State College, both in Vermont.

The Horseneck Beach piece, which took Ms. Sgorbati three months to create, had never been performed before and will likely never be put on again.

"A lot of the Site Dances are just one-time pieces. They're for a specific site and sometimes for a particular time of year," said Ellen Noble, a friend of Ms. Sgorbati's group.

The performance, repeated at 5 p.m. Saturday, was videotaped, but afterward Ms. Sgorbati insisted, "The taping is really for other people. For me, it's the total experience of doing the dance. I just really love it."

When the musicians were ready, the three dancers each moved behind one upright of the sculpture and waited, motionless, facing the ocean, their backs to the sculpture and the dozen spectators who sat or stood on the sand. A cool breeze blew in off the water.

The musicians — using bells, chimes, a home-made xylophone, whistles, an air tank and a sheet of tin hung between two posts — began playing and soon settled into what seemed an Oriental beat.

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Staff photos by John Sheckler

Dancing in the sand

With abstract sculpture as a backdrop, dancer Agi Reck performs on Horseneck Beach in Westport Saturday. The work was performed twice and videotaped.