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Dance Repertory Theater at UW-Madison [A review of a performance by the Dance Repertory Theater]

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DANCE REPERTORY THEATER AT UW-MADISON

BY CURTIS L. CARTER

DANCE REPERTORY THEATER at the University of Wisconsin-Madison continues to produce new works in its three or more concerts each year.

Resident choreographers Anna Nassif and Lonny Gordon each provide repertory works, and visiting artists--such as this year's candidate Sybil Huskey--augment the performances with their own works. Student performers, the choreographers, and occasional guest dancers supply the performances.

The results are uneven, sometimes very good, sometimes disappointing. The November, 1978, concert happened to be one of better concerts of recent years. It included three group works and three solos.

The three solos offer an interesting contrast of styles, comparing the approaches of Nassif and Gordon. The program included Gordon's "Cactus Night Bloom 1977-78" performed by Venetia Chakos Stifler, and his "Ella's Earth," danced by Jenny Burrill. Both dances are impressionistic psychological studies of narcissism, filled with sexual symbolism.

DANCE DIMENSIONS

The woman in "Cactus Night Bloom" moves in a small space that is carefully designated by the lighting. Boundaries established by the hard edges of the light seem to imprison her as she gropes with forces that seem to block the fulfillment of some unsatisfied need. The movement has a frenetic quality that continuously builds in tension and reveals a self-absorbed personality. The excitement of the piece is enhanced by an interplay of moving shadows and the dancer's movement. Light and shadow, together with the movements, act as a self-revealing mirror for the character in the dance.

The woman in "Ella's Earth" is dressed in silver sequins. She moves slowly, interacting very much with the physical props. She poses on a chair, walks around the stage in a pensive mood, and wraps herself in a long flexible tubing. The character is less well-developed than the lady in "Cactus Night Bloom" but the same well-timed light theatrical quality is present in both works.

Nassif's "Mystic Portrait," danced by Susie Whipp, contrasts sharply with Gordon's two solos. "Mystic Portrait" is stark and humorless when compared to the more whimsical ladies of Gordon's dances. Nassif's lady lacks humor, but she manifests infinitely greater depth and

subtlety. The choreography is correspondingly richer in structure. It matches perfectly the subtle score provided by composer Yehuda Yannay.

Susie Whipp danced beautifully in "Mystic Portrait." Her careful phrasing throughout the piece reflected her excellent preparation. Her work in this piece demonstrates the importance of disciplined preparation a feature that is too often lacking in university student performances.

Two ensemble pieces, "Tree Dance" and "Presence" were also choreographed by Nassif. "Tree Dance" was presented in a much rougher form last year in Milwaukee. The present performance is much improved.

The props include five sculptural trees by artist Steven Applequist, a large parachute, and long poles that are carried by the dancers. The parachute is effectively manipulated to enhance the rising, falling movements and the circular shapes that characterize movement patterns in the first part of the piece.

Over all, the visual integration of the poles and other props into the complex movements resulted in clear and strong images.

Nassif's solo work in this dance incorporates hand movements from

Indian Classical Dance. Nassif danced better in this piece than she has in several years. Her movement was more purposive, and exhibited greater artistic control.

"Presence" is a new work in progress. The bare structure of the work remains flat and insufficiently articulated in its present form. The intermixing of themes from "Don Quixote" and Joyce's Molly Bloom promises a substantial work that has not yet been realized in performance.

Sybil Huskey choreographed "Delicate Configurations" for 13 dancers to music by J.S. Bach. The piece is a pleasant exercise in formalist dance composition. It contains elegant phrases that are nicely performed by the dancers. The movement is light, implemented mainly with slow tempos.

