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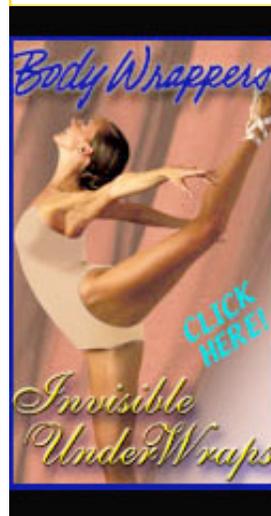
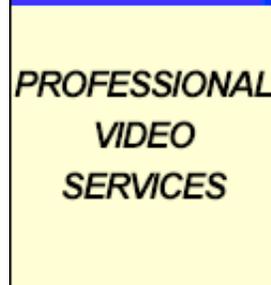
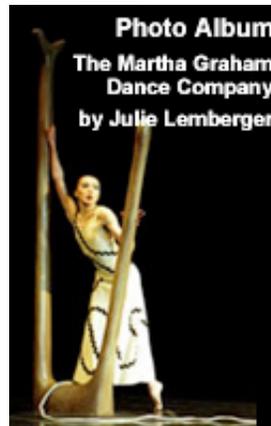
Flash Review 1, 6-10: Spaces  
On the non-Frontal Frontier with Blum Dance Theatre

By Tom Patrick  
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NEW YORK -- I was anxious to see this Brooklyn Lyceum, a "former bath-house turned theater" in Park Slope, and it is indeed a very large space for dance and a jewel in the rough. (Note to choreographers: Check out all this acreage for a future event!) Blum Dance Theatre took every advantage of all that room Friday in a charged and evocative presentation as part of breedingground productions' Spring Fever series.

It was a mixed-media evening of dance and film, led off by the creepy-sounding "Dr. Rajaich's eyeball video" as a prelude to the dance work "My Mother's Eyeball." As we saw close-ups of Suzanne Blum's cornea being invaded and pushed around, I wasn't sure if I cared that the video was projected onto a wrinkly black curtain, all but obscuring it. Oh well, we'll just call it suggestive. Choreographer Wendy Blum and dancers -- Jill Cantaluppi, Despina Stamos, and Diane Vivona -- took the stage next in a cubistic exploration of states-of-being when one (and one's family) is peripheral to surgery... those rapid highs and lows, those restless interactions with family struggling with their own apprehensions, trying to maintain outward cheer in spite of inner anxiety.

The dance vocabulary I would call highly torsional, at times aggressive and often meditative. It did impart to me that



unsettled feeling, the discomfort of the dire cheeriness of kin, and the restlessness of empathy in such circumstances. Blum and dancers imparted this quite effectively in their broken 'dialogues' and smooth tangles of partnership. Singing and speaking text as they danced, they were backed up acoustically by an evocative mechanical soundtrack, by Spurn. (Elsewhere on the program, the evening was enhanced by the live-music compositions of Justin Mullens.)

As an entr'acte, another video followed: "Swivel: a repeatable performance." Sorry, but the visuals intrigued me, and that black curtain was no good (tsk tsk!) for what seemed like a neat filmed solo by Ms. Blum. Another time, perhaps.

"Egg over easy" is a new work, teasing out the egg as image for this one fragile world of ours and the ways we look at it in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. While I respect that approach, I was a little adrift.... Blum's opening solo had its own daring, certainly, it was full of risk and effort-play, but what was she telling us? Brilliant dancing, to be sure.... Accompanied by a fine live trumpet/trombone duet and recorded sound, Blum was joined by a mysterious pair entering from their seats out with us (are these the Invaders?) who turned out to be Storme Sundberg and Brandt Johnson, all clad in black with the goggles to match. Perhaps they were the government's legendary Men In Black -- who our government and "modern times" tell us we'll be seeing a lot more of in our quest for "security." Choreo from this point was more diverse and quirky, and I felt at one point that Blum was riffing on Graham's "Errand Into the Maze" with a great lift sequence for Sundberg and Johnson.

Also new this year -- well, it's a time-sensitive work -- is "A Pregnant Solo," for Kacie Chang. Clad in pants and a brilliantly-chosen cutaway vest, Ms. Chang was utterly charming! Her dance was gentle, and while certainly she was all-in-motion all of the time, almost everything else was eclipsed by her perfectly round belly and her whimsical smile. Brava! Another winning musical score here too: Matt Cowan's assemblage of intros from oldies of Bowie, Eurythmics, Stevie Wonder and more. Great stuff.

Last year's "Whimsical Bloodhound" brought back Ms. Blum, Ms. Cantaluppi, and Ms. Stamos again in an exploration of father issues (I think!). Lynn-Marie Ruse costumed the trio in some very cool necktie skirts and men's waistcoats cut into halters, very nice indeed. Backed-up by many men's sports coats hung in the background, these women shared recollections of fathers inherited, sometimes knowable and sometimes not. Using more of those daredevil phrases, plunging, grappling and comforting, their interactions again spanned a spectrum of responses to a concept both universal



and intensely personal. Once again the audio assemblage was key: Doug Henderson and John Morton's soundtrack of apple-munching, water sounds and music-boxes suggested memories... some put away and tarnished, some as evocative as a whiff of familiar cologne.

Wendy Blum's dancing and choreography seem predominantly "soloistic." Virtuosity erupts all over the place, affects others (or doesn't) and yields in turn. I say soloistic, I guess, because "ensemble" work isn't really a strong force here. The dancers' interactions seemed to be consequential collisions of people (mirroring real life), asymmetrically phrased, polydirectional, all of it transitional and never dull. Individuals, projecting toward all points on the compass, peopled the stage space. That release from frontalism made the already spacious Lyceum seem huge, and allowed the dancers to approach each other and depart authentically, seen from all sides. I very much appreciated Blum's sonic explorations with her collaborators, as well.

Sadly, this act has closed (I saw the show on the second of two weekends), but check out Wendy Blum's work *somewhere*.

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