

the DANCE i n s i d e r

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Flash Review Journal: Why that's a Queer Thing

Ducking Pink Balloons Under the Radar with Brian Brooks and Cathy Weis (excerpt)

By Chris Dohse

NEW YORK -- Two recent concerts, "Electric Haiku/An Abondanza in the Air" by Cathy Weis (at Dance Theater Workshop) and "Dance-o-Matic" by Brian Brooks Moving Company (Williamsburg Art Nexus), provide an opportunity to consider the plurality of contemporary Queer vision. I don't mean to imply anything about the choreographers' sexualities. I mean theoretical Queer, any celebratory subversive identity at odds with the legitimate, the dominant. The two programs share practical components: both alternate projected film segments, including animation, with live dancing. Weis's work is visually perverse and alternates between wacky and poignant. Brooks is a flesh peddler who knows how good it feels to be naughty.

"Electric Haiku" is a series of seven episodes. The fact that the sections are shortish doesn't justify calling them haikus really, for each is radically different from the others, without a haiku's rigorous, similar formal structure. Most of the segments have an awkward performative quality, the slapdash impact of a half-baked drag show or an impromptu, bewigged, shoestring Halloween parade.

During a short preshow, Weis and collaborator Jonathan Berger enact a dysfunctional Tweedledum and Tweedledee on the wrong side of the bed. She certainly can screech. He cavorts somewhat aimlessly while she rearranges a puppet's arms and legs or dances a hoochie-koo. Then, in her inimitable Appalachian drawl, she welcomes the audience and asks us to turn off our phones.

Two sections evoke earlier uses of live action and the simultaneously projected image of that action. Scott Heron as clown/acrobat in "The Trickster Gets His Comeuppance" shares the distorted visual force and daring physicality of recent work by Caden Manson's Big Art Group. The impossibly enlarged screen presence of Heron's two feet lends them distinct personalities.

A solo by Ksenia Vidyaykina, "With a Shadow of Turning," recalls the disturbing power of Tharp's 1982 milestone "Bad Smells." Vidyaykina does little, but creates an oddly moving, haunting visual. Her double image on the back wall -- cold, gray and almost swan-like in the Petipa sense -- is juxtaposed against her warmly lit figure isolated on the stage, an earthy Hestia. She stands like an acolyte before the graven image of herself.

The soundscore, played live from a station at the side of the action, then digitally manipulated by composer Steve Hamilton, cleverly emphasizes each scene. Steve Berman's constructed scaffold for "Getting the Toothpaste Back Into the Tube" honors the Dada sensibility that any old piece of junk can become art.