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DANCE REVIEW | CATHY WEIS

The Interplay of Live Action and Film

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Cathy Weis has made a career of suggesting how very much dance and film have to do with each other, and what peculiar magic the two can make combined. The equipment she uses - monitors and hand-held cameras, for the most part - has a homemade feel, as does the imagery she produces with it. The movement she creates and the people she chooses to perform are just as peculiar. And the way she unsentimentally weaves in her own real-life struggle with multiple sclerosis makes the point, without overdoing it, that the body itself produces a rough kind of magic.

Ms. Weis's new "Electric Haiku: Calm as Custard," which opened last night for a two-week run at Dance Theater Workshop, is a suite of short pieces in the format of her 2002 "Electric Haiku." This latest show begins with her recent "Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad," a trio for Jennie Liu, Scott Heron and a camera, which introduces Ms. Weis's brand of imagination with real-time video replication of live performers on a screen framed by a backdrop that looks like a toy-theater proscenium. In one dazzling section, Ms. Liu's moving body becomes six of her, ranged along a staircase that seems to reach back to the Hudson River.

Ms. Weis revisits previous work here. But in "Calm as Custard," she also moves into new territory. Less wonderfully raucous than the first "Electric Haiku," this piece is not yet the finished theatrical production it is likely to become during the engagement. But it is, most interestingly, more like a poetic, slightly introspective conversation with the artist than much of her other work. Some of that conversation doesn't work, like her introductory speech (which may have suffered from opening-night nerves) and a dumb midperformance interruption.

But all is forgiven when two gnomish creatures (Ms. Weis and Jennifer Miller) manipulate a monitor on a dark stage so that it resembles eerie floating plasma in a Victorian séance. Or when a dancer (Diane Madden) and her diaphanous, rustling jacket become not just the subject but also the creator of video imagery. Or when a trapezoidal screen projected on a larger screen becomes a lithe dancer, too, along with the images that play across its surface, an effect achieved partly with a gliding camera dolly.

Ms. Weis returns to a reality of sorts in the final "haiku," in which her performers join her and a monitor-headed mannequin singing "The Streets of Laredo," stranded, apparently, on an imaginary long, lonely highway along and over which high-speed cars and airplanes pass. Steve Hamilton created the live sound. The lighting was by Jennifer Tipton, and the inspired costumes were by Mr. Heron, Kelly Horrigan, Danny Michaelson and Howlpop.

The program repeats through Feb. 26 at Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th Street, Chelsea, (212) 924-0077.