



Fine Young Animals

Elizabeth Zimmer

published: November 10, 1998

Sharply etched portraits— in movement, language, sound, shadow, and light— dominate this fall's strong Fresh Tracks roster. Five of the six works on the juried program look like solos, though the best

of them are genuine collaborations. Mei-Yin Ng calls her *Graffito* a duet with designer Cristina Ottolini, whose system of projected images precisely calibrates with Ng's movement to create genuine magic. The dance — a visual poem, really— masks the sounds of a slide projector with recorded industrial music by Cypher 7, so that it's impossible to tell which images are the artist's shadow and which are simply thrown by the projector; the single figure seems to cast several identical shadows. With great subtlety, Ng and Ottolini manipulate our senses.

Powerfully theatrical and heavily scripted, Liam Clancy's *The Orientation* (adapted from a short story by Daniel Orozco) and Karl Anderson's *Weaving Through the Grid* (directed by Daniel Safer, with an ominous aural environment created onstage by Evan Gray) combine grotesque narrative with equally strange, disjunctive gestures.

Clancy's monologue offers a guided tour of an imaginary office, led by a confident, barefooted guy in a white shirt and

tie, nominally welcoming us, actually revealing the menace and pain stewing just below the placid surface. Each inhabitant of the corporation is introduced with a symbolic movement motif; Clancy periodically drops to the floor in paroxysms of clenches and kicks. This Streb alum packs a full deck of physical and verbal skills.

Even more sinister, though less precise in its language, Anderson's piece begins with a spotlight on a noose, and slowly reveals a man with his head in a cage, his voice amplified, his body encased in a suit and tie. He bombards us with statistics real and fabricated, serious and absurd, a litany of social disasters segueing into racist fictions. He fishes a china cup and saucer from his pockets and pretends to drink, then sheds his entire costume— tie, jacket, shirt, trousers— to reveal a second, identical ensemble under the first, down to another cup and saucer in the pockets.

Wrestling his cage, refusing the possibility of removing it, he's informed by his accompanist that it's time to kill himself. He ducks into the noose and announces that one of the 17 remaining straight men in Manhattan will be raffled off at the end of the show. A lot of this is engaging, funny, and terrifying,

Paul Taylor



Karl Anderson, DTW's House Manager, In A Smaller Box Office

Details:

Fresh Tracks

Dance Theater Workshop

Tuesdays through November 10

Ballet Preljocaj

Brooklyn Academy of Music

but finally I don't quite take Anderson's point. I do look forward to seeing what else he's got up his sleeve: his last theatrical venture graced the Kitchen with foot-square blocks of wheatgrass.

Like Anderson, Barbara Mahler peels off a costume to reveal an identical one underneath it, and her solo comes as close as anything on this program to actual old-fashioned dancing, but I find her *At the Door* opaque. To excerpts from Schubert's string quartet *Death and the Maiden*, she seems to be dealing with loss. Eva Lawrence's *Failing Opposition* takes the white-clad artist from a frontal, upright orientation to a seated one, facing away from us, leaning on a hassock; this piece, while more concentrated than Mahler's in gesture, is equally unyielding of intent.

Molly Rabinowitz's *Liquid Grip* uses a portable ballet barre as though it were a jungle gym. Rabinowitz, Cris-tina Latici, and Ellis Wood, competent gymnasts, sling themselves around the equipment, accompanied by their own heavy breathing. At first they merely revel in physical skill; soon, narcissistic ballerina personalities begin to emerge. Athletic and entertaining, the dance has the coy appeal of a '40s backstage flick; though no one speaks, it says volumes.

Originally created for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1990 and reprised at BAM by his own ensemble, Angelin Preljocaj's *Romeo and Juliet* is as modern as tomorrow, and tremendously affecting. Pruning Sergei Prokofiev's wonderfully bombastic 1938 score and the plot of Shakespeare's play, it plants the familiar story in some Eastern European courtyard, recasting the feuding aristocrats as fascistic militia on the Capulet side, the Montagues as a ragtag band of vagrants. This 90-minute, intermissionless version alternates menace with vulnerability; in one confrontation, a Montague, threatened with a Capulet nightstick, attempts to kiss his assailant in a scene reminiscent of Kent State, 1970.

The lovers, Sylvain Groud and Claudia de Smet in the cast I saw, fall upon each other like starving animals; he's a ruffian, she's an affluent young delinquent with two bodyguards sharing the role of her Nurse (and moving like high-spirited fillies). Her tribe are uptight blackshirts caressed mechanically by women in dark velvet gowns; she wanders bad neighborhoods in an oversize white blouse and tiny white undies. She and Romeo do it in the road or in the boiler room: no mattress, no curtains, just a few moments together, as a guard with a real German shepherd paces a parapet over their heads.

The Capulets speak the universal language of intimidation, the Montagues move like men with no place to go. The duets between Romeo and Juliet— alive and copulating, or one trying to revive the other— are devastating; I'd have sat through the whole thing again immediately. As long as we're bringing revised ballet classics to Broadway, someone should find this astonishing piece of dance theater a long-term berth; it's truly the event of the year.