

## Review of Danceteller

# Artistry found lacking

"We must remember that Art is an expression and an instrument of Human Personality. Art goes beyond the making of pictures and statues, symphonies and dances; it goes beyond the classes in which these crafts are taught. Art is the quality that makes the difference between merely witnessing or performing things and being touched by them shaken by them changed by the Forces that are inherent in everything we give or receive."

--John Dewey

I went to Danceteller's concert expecting to experience an evening of the Art of modern dance. I left having witnessed well-trained bodies performing their craft.

Throughout the one hour and forty-five minutes that I required myself to remain at the concert--realizing that I was untouched, unshaken, unchanged--I found myself being tormented by a single question: Why?

I had come to the concert expecting to enjoy. Before me were performers whose bodies repeatedly reassured me they were capable of expressing the art in which they had been trained: the well-developed, clearly defined leg and neck muscles of Trina Collins, her powerful feet and toes which launched her into the air and then, spread, allowed her to make gentle contact with the floor during her feature performance in **DOLLS**; the effortless, balletic lifts the male dancers executed in **Allegro**; the precision, single-body way in which the company raised itself, one-at-a-time, from kneeling to standing in **MARY**. Why was I not experiencing it? Where was the Art?

I found myself listening to the music of Britten and Vivaldi and being irritated by the visual distraction on the stage. During sections of **COUNTRY DANCES**, I found myself trying to determine whether the female dancers were supposed to be doing the same movements or if each had her own particular combination to execute. If the first were true, the performance was sloppy; if the second, the choreography was indistinctive.

I felt I was witnessing a poorly modified, precisely executed imitation of Martha Graham's **LAMENTATION** in Collins' performance of **Sloth**. I found myself on the **ROADS TO HELL** looking for Art.

As the **DOLLS** filled the stage, I realized why I was bored by what I was watching: the artistic Force was not being given to the audience; I was not being touched by it. I



Perhaps the camera captures the expression of artistic Force that was not evident to the naked eye at last Thursday night's Danceteller performance.

photo by Mike Kondor

was merely witnessing other people making dances. I felt cheated. I would have preferred to have been exercising my own body rather than simply sitting square on my hips wondering how I would be able to express this discovery.

The opening pose of **MARY** piqued my interest. It was lovely to hear harmonious music being created and projected from within the two dancers' bodies. As the rhyme was repeated, I felt I was witnessing the time period of 1967 to 69--its questioning protests (demonstrated in the foot-stamping sequence which underscored "where"), its impatience (represented by the interruption of each performer's attempt to recite the rhyme), its "beautiful" marijuana-smoking gurus (cleverly portrayed by the lamb-costumed Neil Christiansen). And still, I was only being allowed to watch.

Every performer, regardless of his medium (dance, drama opera, etc.) has the responsibility for giving some portion of the artistic Force, creative energy, that intangible Something to his audience. It is the performer's duty to allow his audience to be touched, shaken or changed.

None of the members of Danceteller did this. Each kept that energy within the bounds of the performing

area. Even Merce Cunningham does not insult his audience in that manner. His dancers may each work within His/her own space but, while performing within that space, they also give out the creative energy which may be received by their audience--even an audience which is shut away from them by celluloid.

I realize this is Central Pennsylvania. I realize Danceteller's audiences may be small and seem unappreciative. I realize that the performing arts are a dialogue between performer and audience. I realize that Central Pennsylvanians are, for the most part, untrained in the art of communication (i.e. knowing when to applaud).

And, I realize that, given these circumstances, the performer has the burden of a monologue thrust upon him.

If a performer is unwilling to accept this burden, he would do his art a greater service by moving on to the creative arena--in dance, this would be choreography-- and using his skills as a maker of things. When the idea of giving becomes absent from the performer, he should not approach an audience. Each will blame the other, but both will withdraw from the encounter feeling -----.

by Darlene Crawford

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