

Antarctica and other dances by Nancy Compton

NANCY COMPTON DANCE THEATER – Antarctica and other dances, with decor by Beth Galston, at the First Church Congregational, 11 Garden St., Cambridge, Friday night. Program repeated Saturday and last night.

For most of us, Antarctica is imagined as a place of unfathomable cold and deep isolation. In Nancy Compton's new choreography, Antarctica is a indeed a cleared-out space, but instead of yielding essences, it is a place where footprints and other signs of human presence are effaced.

Sculptor Beth Galston's translucent white scrimms edge the stage space and take on depth and lavender and pink hues with lighting gels. Behind these are teepees where the dancers

can rest off-stage while remaining dimly visible, and where, halfway through the dance, one dancer stands totemic, swabbed in ultraviolet. Against this environment, the four dancers wearing white leggings and sleeveless shirts look bleached – even Andrew Grossman's new wave white hair seems deliberate. Compton's weighted motions have an air of sobriety, even when they are rubbernecked walks that evoke migrating animals or obsessive hand-washings that seem to indicate something secret. A svelte Carole Drago, who always seems to look as if her dancing has a personal narrative subtext, is especially good here, although the overextended activity of "Antarctica" eventually makes everyone look as if they were trudging through an endless,

unmarked terrain.

Kathleen Tirrell-Johnson, originally scheduled to dance this program was injured and had no understudy, so Compton ended up presenting two repertory pieces as trios instead of quartets. This enforced a likable asymmetry. The jazzy, disjointed lunges and head-shakings of "Softly Speaks the Serpent" seemed to go nowhere, but the earlier "Ancient Ocean" with its overlapping glides and the ways the women skip with high arches and erect torsos like Scottish highlanders had a more rigorous design. Jack Kerouac once sat on a dock and transcribed what the surf told him – and Compton's whispered score, in this context, had a similar effect.

– DEBRA CASH