

## Dance

# Time after time

*Wiener, Josa-Jones, and Compton are up to the minute*

by Lisa M. Friedlander

If Josa-Jones's work is about inner states, then the three pieces that Nancy Compton (she's the 1987 recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Choreography Fellowship) presented last weekend are all surface -- but surface in a mostly satisfying way. Compton's approach is less kinesthetic, more visual. She sweeps the movement across the stage space to define its depth, its horizon, and its diagonals. The crystalline symmetry of the spatial design and the directed focus of the dancers gets softened by the spherical rotation of the torso, the sensuousness of throwing the head and spine backward or forward until the bow of the body is curved and poised, ready to loose the arrow of its momentum into space. Unison dancing splinters off into independent but related passages with reorganized but recognizable motifs. The continual repetition of phrases and the neatness of the spatial patterns is reminiscent of both Laura Dean and Lucinda Childs, yet it's not as minimalist as Dean's work nor as obsessively groomed and mathematically determined as Childs's.

Each of the three pieces was made for four dancers, but because Kathlee Tirrell-Johnson sustained an injury, two of the works became trios, with considerably altered geometry. Compton enabled the premiere of *Antarctica* to remain intact by dancing Tirrell-Johnson's role herself. *Antarctica* is a collaboration with sculptor Beth Galston, and though it seems weaker than either *Ancient Ocean* (1983) or *Softly Speaks the Serpent* (1986), it does break new ground in the way it integrates movement and environment. Four L-shaped, ceiling-high structures made from gauzy cloth stretched across wood frames define the corners of the performing space and suggest compass points. In back, another filmy screen is set up, behind which a cone, peak, or teepee-like structure (made of the same fabric) stands. Another teepee is placed in the upper stage left L. Purple lighting illuminates these from within and makes it possible for you to look through them.

As the dancers move between and behind these structures, they move from invisible to shadowy to immediate. You could be looking through sheets of clouds or falling snow, or through veils of consciousness. The setting is mysterious, and the white-costumed dancers drift across the landscape. Recurring motifs -- a fast clapping of hand against back of hand, a championing of bent and fisted arms, a ritual hand-washing -- suggest a tribe or closed society. Yet the ceremoniousness is present in the absence of ceremony. The polar geography of *Antarctica* never quite translates

into any magnetism the dancers might exert on each other. When they do go behind the screens their scope of action is limited. Leaving and returning seems unmotivated, and when Carole Drago returns from her journey behind the upstage screen she simply rejoins the other dancers, as if neither her absence nor her presence was felt.

By the end you might wonder how the dancers could remain unchanged by their discoveries. Yet it's here, at the border between dance form and allusion, that *Antarctica* brings you, and so Compton seems to be striving for a more multilayered expression than is evident in the other two pieces. Fiona Marcotty, Carole Drago, and Compton herself danced all three pieces; they were joined in *Antarctica* by area newcomer Andrew Grossman. As an ensemble these dancers were extremely tight, highly sensitive to one another -- a requirement of Compton's work, which depends so much on the clarity of body shape and spatial design. Her trimmed but space-eating pieces are viscerally arresting, luscious in their earthy weightedness. Marcotty, with her strong, long limbs and determination, gave an especially juicy performance. □