

Winter 1988

# HIGH PERFORMANCE

#44

A Quarterly Magazine for the New Arts Audience

\$6

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archetypal gestures: writhing; holding their stomachs; shaking their fists. Both ancient and timeless in Nagin's heavy, flowing robes, the women beckoned to the heavens as they launched themselves in violent vertical thrusts, echoing Rusnak's percussive, repetitive score in what appeared to be images of digging and burying. As the music began to build in volume and tempo, the movement became increasingly frenetic and possessed. Miller used reckless spins and crazed, out-of-control arches of the back and head to achieve a climax of despair. Then, when the pressure finally broke, she allowed the dancers to fall into quiet attitudes of prayer. The following ensemble exploration, punctuated by Bob Steineck's shadowy lighting and a sweeter, more melodic turn in the score, centered around ballet's second position, which Miller, by exaggerating the plie, metamorphosed into a placating gesture. The ensemble dancing in this sequence contained some powerful static moments, resting in the mind's eye like icons of sadness painted on the Abbey's surface.

In the final section the ensemble broke apart, and the dancers' movement, though still mirroring one another, was scattered in odd angles along the facade. Rusnak's score, while never very sophisticated and sometimes cliched, was so lushly emotional here that it flooded the space, perfectly accenting the rich performance quality of Miller's vocabulary. She and her fellow dancers, Denise Azzari and Karen Simmons, used their faces as both movement and acting tools, achieving an unusual blend of kinetic aloofness and emotional intensity. In this final section of still exploration and quiet agony, the facial effects were nearly heartbreaking.

Though Miller's movement ideas were occasionally overly literal (the grave digging sequence, for example), her acute sense of paradox in art and life, in dancing and environment, was well realized. *In the Silence, Veiling* brought the dead to life, illustrating stillness through movement and allowing levels of artistic reality and layers of time to interact in a visceral fashion.

Lynne Conner



Aviary

Stretching from the 45-foot ceiling to the floors and walls were huge columns and angular, sail-shaped scrim that carried the viewer's eye upward, creating a sense of immense "size." Suspended in the center of the space between two sets of opposing bleachers for the audience was a large, translucent projection screen, and opposite the doors, a "forest" of black columns in the shadows. The sensation resembled taking a bite of Alice's famous mushroom and becoming a very small inhabitant of a very large world.

The narrative thread of *Aviary* centered around a blond, Norwegian boy who boards a ship to escape the cold and darkness of the Arctic circle, and an athletic California woman who submerges herself in a swimming pool to escape the heat. In the mythic world of *Aviary*, these characters move toward each other in parallel universes, their thoughts personified as birds (both in the images and story) crossing from one existence to the other, until they meet at a newsstand on a hot city street.

In the process of telling this story, the artists achieved poetic and startling moments. The scrim columns became shafts of light that Skaggs, the solo dancer, moved lithely in and out of. The video superimposed images at times in a fascinating manner, and one image, a closeup of a woman's face submerged just below the surface of a swimming pool, became hypnotically surreal as the slow-motion ripples distorted her features. The sound, sometimes filling the space, sometimes punctuating sharply from specific directions, was a curious mix of bird sounds, spoken narrative, and poetry read in Norwegian.

Unfortunately, *Aviary* didn't achieve the same size and scope as either its environment or the mythic world it tried to create. The problem was that the moments mentioned above never cohered. In fact, at times they detracted from each other. The narrative was too relaxed and "dreamy" to be compelling and its presence prevented the audience from creating their own "story" from the juxtaposition of images. The setting, instead of enhancing the performance, reduced it, making it seem somehow small and emotionless in comparison. This, along with the size of the video screen and the height of the bleachers made Skaggs' dance almost invisible for most of the performance. The sound, except for the narrative, did not create atmosphere and mood to the degree which it could have and at times contained auditory non sequiturs that were more interesting on their own than

in conjunction with the piece. Yet even though *Aviary* failed to create a cohesive, evocative performance, it was an interesting, sometimes intriguing showcase of the artists' talents, one which promised a future coming together in the mythic proportions aspired to in this performance.

A multimedia performance created by:  
Beth Galston, Environmental Design/Lighting Concept  
Ellen Sebring, Video/Music  
Sarah Skaggs, Choreography/Dance  
Floyd L. Bailey III, Lighting Design/Technical Direction  
David Atherton, Sound Mix and Spatial Sound Design  
Jim Abbott, Sound System Design  
Presented by Motel Media, Inc.

Kim Alan Pederson and Kalo Clarke

## PAULA JOSAJONES

"DUSK"

Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center  
Cambridge  
June 10, 1988

Watching Paula Josa-Jones' work in dance, I'm repeatedly struck by the deep level of relaxation that she and her company members work from. Many of us seem generally to be cultivating a knot of tension just at our diaphragms; not finding a way to dissolve it, we use it as the basis of our personal styles (if we can). But Josa-Jones lets the ball drop. I've consistently been impressed with the subtlety of articulation she achieves, as well as her ability to embody distinct states of being through movement that seems planned but not choreographed, and is neither classically shaped nor task-oriented. It is a matter of summoning personas and being empty enough at the core to let them live.

The first half of her concert titled *Dusk* consisted of two solo pieces, both featuring figures struggling toward and achieving transformation. *Anima Motrix* opened with Josa-



Paula Josa-Jones

Pam White

boston

## "AVIARY"

MULTIMEDIA PERFORMANCE

Philippe Villers Experimental Media Facility  
Cambridge

May 12-15, 1988

*Aviary*, a multimedia performance created by Beth Galston, Ellen Sebring, and Sarah Skaggs, made a vivid impression as soon as the doors to the Philippe Villers Experimental Media Facility ("the Cube") were opened.