



Dance Insider.com, January 2002

Flash Review 3, 1-16: Storytellers

Tales of the Unbidden, the Unhinged, and the Ladykillers from Geismar and Willberg

By Chris Dohse

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NEW YORK -- From two dance concerts seen serendipitously in the same week, can generalizations be made about female choreographers in New York? In this specific case (Aviva Geismar/Drastic Action's "The Unbidden and Unhinged," just closed at Here, and Kriota Willberg/Dura Mater's "Ladykillers," running through January 20 at Axis Company), simple similarities can certainly be drawn. The two choreographers are post-emerging, not yet mid-career. They both currently work with all-female casts. Their dances tell stories. Both Geismar and Willberg make important, hybrid tanztheater, dances full of ideas.

Geismar first appears alone onstage in 2001's "Three Scenes from 'Vanya.'" She makes an elegant Yelena, in maroon pantsuit, earrings dangling. This solo and its companion fragments are not danced for pleasure, but are character studies, fraught with meaning. Vanessa Adato's masterful solo as Vanya for Geismar is beautifully danced, and only her trousers reveal her gender. Shostakovich reinforces the timeworn quality of private, fin de siecle gladrags worn after the party guests have gone home.

The strong central character drawn by Geismar in "The Unbidden and Unhinged" stands in some relationship to Graham's heroines. Surrounded by her own psychodynamic feminine mythology, Geismar adapts her affect to match her attendant demons, from the accusatory to full-bodied slapstick. A dream-like surrealism's odd rationale pervades the piece's nonsensical elements. Two innocents in vestal white face their tribunal. A wild bacchante in red is engulfed by the gray drudgery of mechanized compulsion. Annabelle Chvostek's lunatic soundscore accompanies a bruising briefcase ritual with the gestural force of Joos's "Green Table."