



## Fit to be Tied

In Williamsburg, a trial of good, evil, the angry, and profane

By George Russell

Aviva Geismar's most recent evening pit the ready and able women of her company, Drastic Action, against tight choreographic strictures—sometimes a labyrinthine dyad, sometimes a space smaller than the dancer's own kinesphere. Geismar's meticulous choreography investigates every crevice of these confined worlds with wry determination.

In part one of *The Unbidden and Unhinged* (seen at Williamsburg Art Nexus), Geismar plays both prosecutor and defendant—the case: “Self v. self.” Her form-fitting costume wittily references a business suit but skin peeks from barred cut-out windows. I can't put the story of Geismar's solo in words for you; but Geismar's body leads us through a non-linear “argument” that permits neither confusion nor distraction. She slices air with a finger, then licks the finger as if blowing smoke from a fired gun. She traces her body with hands like generals dividing a conquered country on a map. Parts of her body move independently of each other, some held, some shaking, traversing space, a garrulous cabal that wreaks chaos on itself, and barely holds together. The prosecutor/defendant seduces, mocks, deceives us—as a character, we cannot know or trust her; but her performance holds us in thrall. Her closing head-over heels laughter could be victorious glee or rubber-room hysteria.

Section three is a driving quintet for Roberta Cooper, Gina Jacobs, Sarah Lewis, Anna Smith, and Vanessa Adato. Businesswomen slam, exchange and manipulate briefcases through deft space and time—sometimes offhand, sometimes desperate or over-the-top slapstick. The briefcase is evidence, baggage, a literal/ figurative burden, a weapon, and a power source. These are not individuals, but women, cogs in a larger machine that abducts and moves them, with or against their will. Ultimately the women bayonet and club themselves, killing the machine, ending up splattered.

The middle panel of the triptych is less clear. A duo of judges, swathed as if costume designers Mindy Nelson and Carol Brys had sliced judges' robes into giddy swirls, torment two cringing innocents until a figure in red banishes them. Part two cinches the narrative, but the choreography lacks the spatial and conceptual clarity—and irony—of the other sections.

The Fitting opens on Emily Bunning and Geismar in a tiny square of light, alternating undulations and spurts like phases of cellular metabolism. Their movement expands to suggest nuzzling animals and opens into dialogue about relationship and individuation. What physical rapport the dancers share! Geismar's choreography, always crafted with sharp visual detail and sensual presence, gorgeously twines two quite disparate movers. Bunning is angular and striving; Geismar sensual and somber. The mesmerizing amalgam strikes chords in the gut and soul.

Longtime Geismar dancer Vanessa Adato's startling presence elevates ordinary moments to kinesthetic epiphanies. In *Durable Goods*, Adato meets an obstacle in the form of Geismar, a fiendish assistant/enemy who sticks post-its on her and even binds her limbs together with tape. The constriction becomes grotesque—yet there is dignity. Somehow, even when Adato is bound by tape, she dances. In an uncharacteristically jolly ending for Geismar choreography, the heroine triumphs by cartoonishly rolling the choreographer offstage in a blizzard of tape.

The program began with *Sure Grip*, a solo that sketches the evening's theme. Clownishly costumed Roberta Cooper swerves between comedy and tragedy, dragged by her own hand and other forces. Cooper's bound, grounded, determined movement seems always to meet external resistance. Even tossed limbs swing relative to a fixed torso, enhancing the feeling of restriction rather than transcending it. The impression is of forthright effort against inalterable circumstance. Cooper moves from distress to struggle to laughter in the face of her bewildering predicament.