

# WOMANDANCEART

by Naomi Jackson

Postmodern dance is alive and demanding a consistent venue in the Atlantic Region. This was demonstrated at the Regional Dance Showcase presented at the Church on March 12 by Eye Level Gallery Dance Series.

Postmodern dance is a broad term which embraces a wide variety of contemporary dance. From the point of view of technique it involves finding new sources of movement from which to draw material and new ways to combine movement, sound, and décor when creating a dance. The increased use of text and other media such as film and video is a special fea-

ture which entails the breaking down of traditional notions of dances as "pure movement".

From the point of view of meaning, postmodernism often involves choreographers offering a personal statement concerning gender, politics, and/or society as a whole. The material is sometimes very autobiographical in nature, or the dance may deal more impersonally with stereotyped images which an audience is familiar with.

Each of the choreographers' works on the Showcase programme displayed some of the features of postmodernist technique, while being strongly united by their need to express feelings of female strength and

weakness. Highly appropriate for International Women's Week, for some, this entailed playing with conventional imagery of women; for others, it was more subtly displayed through use of more personal movement vocabularies.

Mary Lou Martin in *The Demise of My Youth and Wisdom* harked back to the swiny, jumping steps of the rocking '70s and integrated them, somewhat loosely, with actions drawn from ballet and modern dance. A solo, with two women moving in choreographic counterpoint to her, the piece progressed through phases of overt indulgence in the raw, sexual rhythms of Led Zeeplin to a more lyrical, jazzy passage of the music during which Martin seemed to express both the hopefulness and confusion of teenage existence.

Julie Sauvé's piece *Women vs. Women* combined a variety of theatrical sequences using props, costumes, and television, with more abstract movement phrases of kicks and turns. Sauvé, as housewife, explored various personalities from the confines of her home. In a manner which was clever but somewhat dated, the choreo-

grapher drew on imagery of baby bottles, laundry, aerobics and soap operas to establish the boundaries of her character's existence, then moved to the worlds of seductive Bolero dancer and sophisticated businesswoman as two personalities which offered a means of escape from an otherwise trivial existence.

*God is in Dartmouth* by Gwen Noah closed the first half of the programme. Noah's work integrated spoken dialogue, slides, and live music with intricately conceived movement sequences derived from a highly personal vocabulary of actions. Imagine a snarling mouth sharply biting a hand followed by a slow, gentle caressing of the face. It was such sharp juxtapositions in character and tempo which characterized Noah's work and caused increasing tension in the viewer. Without being overtly religious, Noah's piece ultimately conveyed the intensity of her own physical movement experience and left the audience deeply moved.

Renée Rioux's *Solo*, like Martin's work, was really a solo set against a background of a group. Dressed in white tunic and pants, Rioux broke out of a shuffling circle of women and performed flowing phrases of slow turns and spins derived from more traditional modern dance,



punctuated by sudden stops on the floor. The extensive use of repetition, also occurring in the sound track of layered text, led to a sense of urgency and unrest by its very incessant nature. As with Noah's pieces, the work appeared as a personal meditative look at female experience in which both softness and harshness were present.

To close the evening was Lois Brown's performance art piece which used film and video. *Embracing the Bride*, like Sauvé's piece, played with imagery derived from the realm of social convention. Dressed in a white wedding dress with plastic overskirt, Brown offered a satirical view of "bride" life. At one point she threw a wedding bouquet attached to a string to a member of the audience, then reeled it in, saying, "I'm sorry, I've made a terrible mistake".

Brown's surreal film *Horror of Personality* and video *Dad* offered a provocative example of how multi-media productions address complex issues from a variety of positions. The film showed the 'bride' taking bloody revenge on the macho film tradition of men who "come to claim their bride", whereas the father's biographical account of her childhood in the video directly addressed Brown's personal experience as a woman. Thus, Brown's piece was able to function on different levels in order to make a strong social statement about the role of women.

As a whole, the evening was enthusiastically received and offered people a rare opportunity to see the latest work by local postmodern choreographers. The Eye Level Gallery Dance Series continues throughout the year and will hopefully receive the same level of support in the future as was obvious during this event.

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Professor Robert Redden will be available to discuss the Boston-Bouvé College Graduate Program in Speech, Language Pathology and Audiology at Dalhousie on March 21, 1988 from 11:30 AM-1:30 PM in the Council Chamber.

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