

entertainment

Meredith Monk's primal dances

By Mary Fraker

Dark stillness. A woman's voice. A lantern. A small figure in white enters, and her eyes sweep the horizon. Meredith Monk is creating another landscape — a plateau — desolate, peaceful, familiar. She inhabits the plateau, journeys through another day there, in a mixture of play and ritual.

With every gesture and sound, Monk composes and further reveals the aura of her landscape. As she removes her sandals, she scrapes them almost noiselessly across the — rock? She pours out the contents of an earthen jug: two stones that thud dryly on the ground. She whirls like a dervish, stirring the desert air with her skirt, the sand with bare feet.

One feels the heat, the dry texture of the air, as her arms carve deliberately through it. She stands by a log, surveying the space beyond, as she alternates sharp percussive panting and clear ringing tones. All wailing, singing, laughing come from vibrations deep within her center — the seeming primal source of all sound and movement. She lies down to rest, cradling her head on an arm.

A train passes. As night closes in, she cradles a tin cup over a fire, then takes her lantern and moves on — into the darkness and another part of the landscape.

The audience gathered in Burton Auditorium Friday night January 27 was fortunate, not only to be transported for half an hour from the post-blizzard Downsview to Placitas, New Mexico (where Monk composed the score for *Plateau* in 1975 and 1976), but also to witness the world premiere performance of the work, which will not be presented in New York until April. The performance was part of a program of works by Meredith Monk and the interdisciplinary performance ensemble, The House, sponsored by the Performing Arts Series on January 26 and 27.

Although completely different programs had been planned for the two nights, only about a hundred people braved the snowstorm to attend Thursday's performance, so part of it — another landscape journey titled *Paris* — was repeated Friday as well. *Paris* is the first of a travelogue series that also includes *Venice*, *Chacon* and *Milan*. Monk and her collaborator Ping Chong — he dressed as a worker, she a cross between a gypsy and a Chaplinesque tramp (complete with mustache) — walk the streets of Paris. Hand in hand they stroll, humming baroque harmonies; they dance, separately and together; Monk flaps her wings like a great bird and careens about the stage, arms akimbo. They kneel in a shelter during a rainstorm, and

wail like children beneath the windows of the sleeping city.

Throughout, a pianist repeats a haunting circular, rhythmic melody — composed, as were the baroque harmonies, by Monk herself — and a single bare lightbulb hangs over the stage. Paris is, after all, the city of lights. It is also a city of theatre, and these glimpses of street life were presented in a highly theatrical context.

The work opened with the traditional *trois coups* and a puppet-like head lip-synching a shrill recorded announcement that the show was about to begin. At its close, the three figures stood center-stage in a pose intended to invite applause.

The House's other two offerings were vocal compositions, *Raw Recital* on Thursday and *Tablet* on Friday. *Raw Recital* was a series of solos composed and performed by Monk, who accompanied herself on the grand piano. In *Tablet*, she was joined by two other women who sang and played recorders.

Both works were an exploration of the voice's possibilities, both in range and expression. The women sang, they wailed; they keened like Irish widows, they chattered and nattered like monkeys. Outside Burton Auditorium, the wind was full of snow; inside, the air vibrated with the sound of Meredith Monk and The House.



Cabaret's duo sure to amuse

By Cynthia Rantoul

Mixed Blessings, Cabaret's two-woman show, opens tonight in McLaughlin Hall at 9 p.m. Written, directed and performed by Pamela Mingo and Cathy Knights, it is a series of acts that pokes fun at just about everything. Cathy will explain in greater detail.

Excalibur: Is this play an attempt at bringing out a message for a woman, or simply light entertainment?

Cathy: I hardly think it's going to dig up any secrets about women that we don't already know. It's just a fun look at the way women think about themselves, think about men and the way men think about women, just all rolled into something that is going to be fun, that you can laugh at.

Excalibur: Why do you consider it a Cabaret and not a play?

Cathy: It's a jungle of songs and skits and jokes and laughs and fops, you know, entertainment to drink beer by but that is what all Cabaret is really.

Excalibur: Since neither you or Pamela are 'theatre people,' what inspired you both to write and perform this production?

Cathy: Well, there is a funny thing at York that to be a 'theatre person' you have to be majoring in performance or . . . production which isn't quite true. Pam and I are both in Fine Arts. We have a background of theatre just as much . . . as a lot of theatre students, we just don't happen to be majoring in the course.

Excalibur: Is there any reason why you and Pamela are the only actresses? Is it because you wanted to project it yourself or you didn't trust the interpretation of your ideas to someone specializing in acting?

Cathy: No, it's not that . . . The first Cabaret of the year is, I think, always a rush job because people are getting back to school. There are a lot of things happening so there were no auditions.

We came up with the idea and we said that we would do it if you (Cabaret Productions) have the time to fit us in and they said sure. It wasn't a matter of not wanting anyone else . . . we wanted to try and see what we could do together.

Excalibur: Was it written before-



Pam Mingo and Cathy Knights.

hand, or did you both put ideas together as the production became further advanced?

Cathy: We started out with a basic idea, that we wanted to work together; what would we like to do. We picked a few ideas and . . . we are still in the process of changing and revising it; finding something out that is 'neato' and doing it and what the show is about is sort of coming after the show, type of thing. We do something and then we see how it is related. And we originally didn't see any relationship with any of the numbers at all but there is now, we see. It's sort of been made up as we go along.

Excalibur: Is there any personal experience(s) that triggered your conceptual idea?

Cathy: Oh, sure! A lot of things from the show are just straight from talking about it; men we've encountered or times of our life that we've lived through, all that idea. A lot of material is taken from books that we just had in our own homes, like *Confidential Chats for Girls* (published 1911) and we just put them together. Some of the songs I knew beforehand and Pam didn't and Pam knew and I didn't and we taught each other. We thought maybe it would fit in. But there is a lot of us in it. It's taken right from our experiences, a lot of it, or from people telling us what happened to them.

Excalibur: Do you think it might make some men more aware of how

they interact with women?

Cathy: It's possible . . . but quite often when you see satires on your own sex, you think oh, that's very true, that's what they are all like . . . except for me! A lot of them are cliché stereo-type ideas anyway that we are just blowing up further. We are not out to moralize or anything so that they may not catch anything from it.

Excalibur: Is there anything more you would like to add?

Cathy: Yeah, about the musicians. We are really lucky we're having three musicians (Armin Schmittat, piano; Jimmy Riviara, drums; Brian Morgan, bass guitar) to back us up. It's usually a piano player or something. The fellows are in on the whole thing. They react to what we do in the show and since they are men, sometimes if we pull a joke on men . . . their reactions are interesting. It's a little unfair to say it's just a two-woman show because we wouldn't be anywhere without these guys and we use them and we talk to them in the show and they entertain the audience as much as we do. They have been a great help.

And the last word from Pamela Mingo:

Excalibur: Pamela, would you recommend this whole experience of creating and performing a Cabaret to anyone who might be interested in joining a future production?

Pamela: Oh yes! It's fun, but it's work too. We have to work at it to make it look like fun.

Harlan film devastates

By Steve Collins

Harlan County, U.S.A., Barbara Kopple's devastating Academy Award winning documentary is a must-see film that should be digested and discussed by all. It deserves our immediate attention for a number of reasons.

Firstly, this 'political' documentary is especially noteworthy since it maintains the emotional impact and dramatic power of a conventional fiction movie, while at the same time giving us the factual information and real-life documentation that we demand of non-fiction films. The tension between, what I would call its dramatic elements (carefully controlled editing) and its realist elements (unadorned photography), gives the work its richness, investing it with overtones that make it a powerful and stimulating document of our times.

Basically, and quite simply, *Harlan County U.S.A.* details the bitter struggle between Kentucky mine-workers and company owners over the workers' decision to become members of the United Mine Workers of America. The film shows the striking workers and their families' efforts to remain organized and united at all costs.

It also graphically demonstrates how state troopers were used to keep the road into the mine open for strike-breakers and depicts the actual, often terrifying, confrontations between workers and scabs. More importantly, it indicates why only the brutal death of one young striker brought about an end to the year-long strike.

Skillfully interwoven throughout this chronological format are short interviews with old, disabled workers and doctors discussing the effects of black lung disease; a moving selection of traditional labour folk songs; historical footage

of the extremely bloody strikes in Harlan during the 1930's and sequences dealing with the U.M.W. leadership fights between Jock Yablonski (later assassinated) and Tony Boyle, and later Arnold Miller and Boyle.

What is so extraordinary about the film, besides the fact that the intercutting between the various discourses is so smoothly executed, is the intimate and passionate way in which Kopple is able to present the actual workers and their women, women who play a crucial role in the hard-fought struggle.

The strength and determination of the strikers is brilliantly captured by Kopple and her dedicated crew. They are a rare group of filmmakers whose commitment to, and compassion for, the exploited is evident in almost every frame. Like the workers, they too had to participate in and endure the picket-line confrontations with the state-troopers and gun-wielding strike breakers.

Interestingly enough, even though Kopple and crew obviously supported the workers and their cause, they did not fall into the trap of romanticizing the miners and their families. And yet, they still managed to gain some acute insights into the tough life of those people, frequently recording 'privileged moments' of intense emotionality.

One scene in particular comes to mind. During a huge union rally a frail, old woman is asked to sing a song. She steps up to the microphone and tells the enthusiastic crowd that her husband and father were both coal-miners — one died of black-lung disease while the other died in a mine disaster. She then proceeds to sing in a very raspy voice a rousing 1930's union song. It is entitled *Which side are you on boys, which side are you on*. Ultimately, it is a question the film invites us to ask of ourselves.

The members of the Stong Students Theatre are preparing for a one-act play festival to be performed the evenings of Feb. 7, 8 and 9 in the Stong Theatre (Rm. 112).

The program consists of three modern works: Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (the famous story of an encounter between two men in New York's Central Park); *The Real Inspector Hound* by Tom Stoppard (a totally insane look at the world of theatre); and a premiere performance of a play by one of Stong's students — *A Sailboat Named Zack*.

Admission price is 50c. — Stong Flyer