

AROUND THE NATION: MODERN DANCE IN CONNECTICUT AND NEW JERSEY

NEW HAVEN, Connecticut—Kicking off "Women in the Arts Month," the ten-year-old modern dance company **Barbara Feldman and Dancers** presented two new works along with older repertoire at ARTSPACE at ECA (Educational Center for the Arts) March 2-3. A refined, understated neoclassicism is the hallmark of Feldman's choreography; against it, the extroverted antics of dancer/performance artist **Nikila Cole** in *Dancing Out of Time* the following weekend at ECA was a sharply contrasting sequel—an autobiographical odyssey rich in explicit content.

Feldman's dance background includes modern training with Dan Wagoner and Viola Farber, as well as ballet studies. There's a refined, balletic classicism to her modern dances that weaves through abstracted images and fragmented floor patterns, lending each piece the finished delicacy of a finely crafted object. In a work like *Labyrinth* (1987), dance phrases have the fragile, meticulous quality of glass-etched tableaux, refracted kaleidoscopically through water. Unlike the proverbial Greek vase figures, these fleeting ones are never static.

In fact, it was the older *Labyrinth* that showed to best advantage of all the evening's works. It has gained polish and clarity, the movement a handsome match for composer Dwight Andrews's richly resonant score, which incorporates bells, chimes, and echoing, whispered refrains from Federico Garcí a Lorca's "Ballad of the Little Square."

The dance's central image, as Andrews has noted, is not the *Labyrinth* of classical mythology, but the "ways in which musical and visual relationships can create or uncreate a maze. Implicit in this is the notion that within the labyrinth there exists a center." In Garcí a Lorca's poem, the center is the town square, from which one might stray too far.

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Patterned squares of light in an array of sizes, projected on the floor and backdrop (designed by Robert Wierzel), heighten the sound-dappled texture of bubbling water and percussive syllables, against which dancers flit in designed disconnectedness.

Feldman uses her well-knit ensemble like so many tonal threads, in a constantly shifting floor pattern of twos and threes, to create a fragile surface tension. Paralleling Andrews's musical erosion of Garcí a Lorca's poem, their fleeting tableaux remain elusive, impenetrable. Yet, a final section with wide-armed dancers evenly spaced, simultaneously sculpting the air, patting it with purpose, twisting and folding their torsos, united dancer and viewer with its strong focus on the body's center. It felt like the experiential key to this internalized dance.

REVIEWS



B. Gray