

# Modern dance returns to city

By Phillip Greene

Last night Barbara Feldman & Dancers offered the first of four performances this weekend at the Educational Center for the Arts. What a pleasure to see modern dance again — in New Haven it is all too much of a rarity.

Founded in 1981, the company now includes Feldman, Margi Caplan, Tom Haskell, Amy Kennedy-Wooten, Suzanne Serviss and Fran Smyer-Dubrow. They presented four works all choreographed by Feldman, and the last two were premieres: "Sisters" and "Chant of Saints."

## DANCE REVIEW

Accompanying the first were readings and live music by Kalpana Devi-Schreiber and James Anthony Finlayson. And the last work featured a commissioned composition by Dwight Andrews, four movements orchestrated for jazz quintet and string ensemble.

A short taped portion of a show all about sisters, from NPR's "All Things Considered," served as prelude to seven vignettes performed by the women. Mixing dance and light political theater, "Sisters" inventoried some of the confining roles which women may inherit.

If it was a study in frozen affections and amusingly satiric enactments, (the dancers in pastel nightgowns), it also allowed moments for them to express an almost luminescent innocence, in slow motion turning away from the audience, alert and curious.

Best of all was Feldman's solo, using the only props of the evening — a girl doll seated center stage in a little chair. A scary kind of lullaby was sung with kalimba accompaniment, as Feldman circled round, then succumbed to the doll's magnetic power. Yet at the end, balancing on the back of the chair which was tilted slightly off the floor, Feldman beautifully suggested an image of poised tension which subtly undercut the threat of regression and overidentification.

"Chant of Saints" was a more directly joyous work, both in the music and dance. Andrews' composition, effectively contrasting then integrating the strings and jazz quintet, implied there is struggle implicit in any prayer. Similarly, the circle created by all the dancers at the end was hard-won over the intermittent defection by some of its members.

Feldman's choreography here, as in the other two works, depended on the motivic repetition of movements, recycled assymetrically. This was especially apparent in the first work "Slipping By" and in "Aerie" (both 1984). The integration of different individual styles, the collaborative feel to the performances, made for a charming concert and interesting modern dance as well.