

# THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

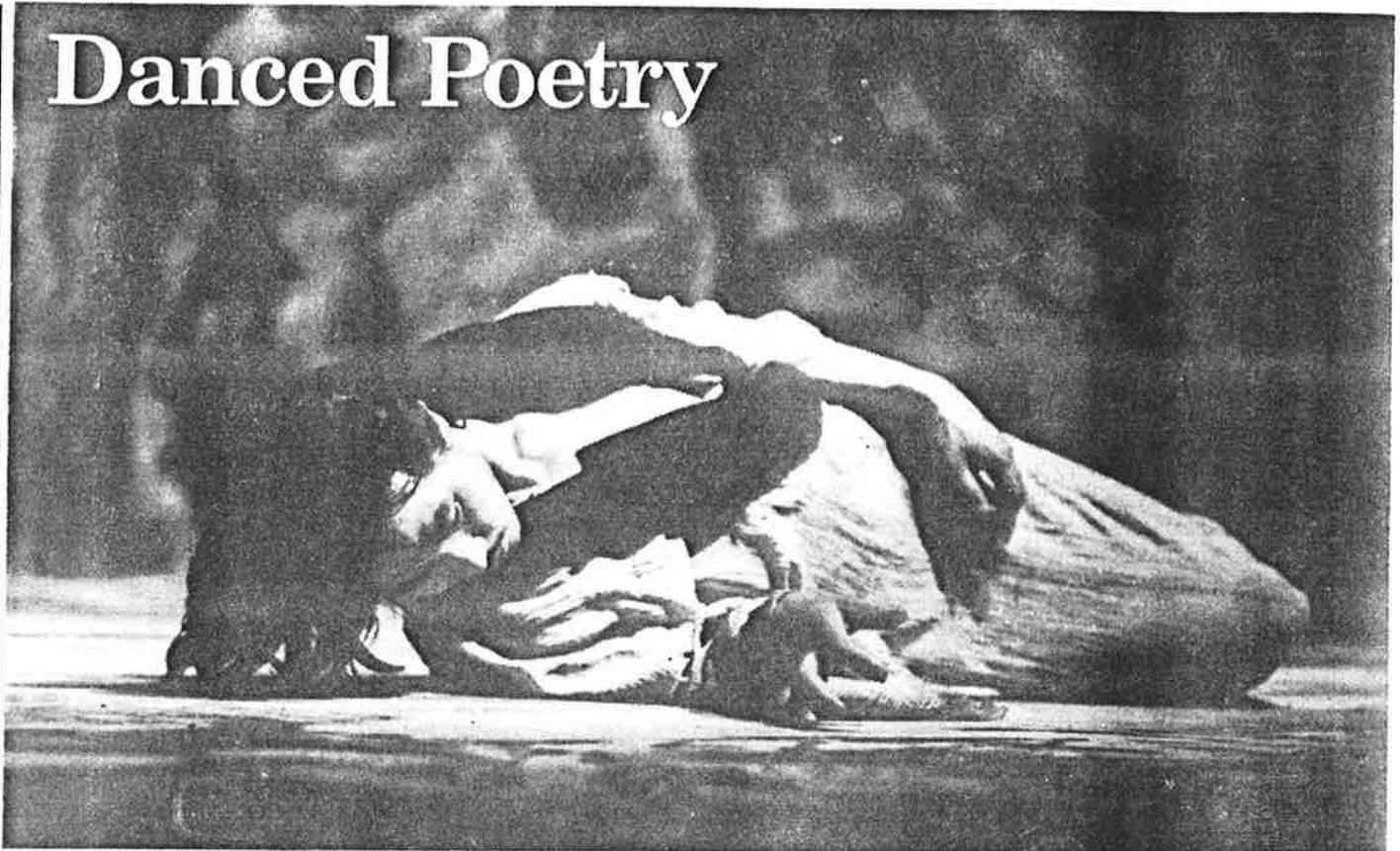
DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

512 West 19th St. (Btwn 10th & 11th Aves) New York, NY 10011

Reservations: 255-5793

## Danced Poetry



Koma (above) and Eiko (below) in *By the River*.

Jack Vartoogian

by Robert Greskovic

*By the River*  
Eiko & Koma  
The Kitchen  
October 7

N E W . Y O R K

# NATIVE

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Jack Vantoogian

Eiko & Koma produced an even more potent piece of theatrical poetry, with even more limited means, than Mutekisha. *By the River* is set in one place, precisely defined by means of a calligraphically painted floorcloth that becomes a looming backcloth (the exquisitely executed set is credited to Eiko & Koma in collaboration with Clayton Campbell). It is peopled by the same two consistently costumed figures (actually Eiko is nude, except for the ashen paint strokes which streak her body). It is scored with an ongoing atmosphere of what might be called "gray noise" with the one-time inclusion of some organ sounds. It is also consistently lighted, so that each of its segments comes and goes with either a suddenness or a subtlety of perception-controlling change. With a masterly concentration on the extremes of black and white, plus some gray, Eiko & Koma create a world so rich, there is no reason to miss color.

Still, the carefully selected trappings in *By the River* are only where the work's power begins, not where it rests. Eiko & Koma create the actual mesmerizing poetry of their finely fashioned piece by means of their fine movement text. Starting with Koma alone, and then Eiko, followed by further passages in which

both performers appear, their poem in black and white proceeds to tell us of the frailty of matter alongside the strength of heroic character. Like their limit on color, Eiko & Koma's use of movement is carefully proscribed. Next to nothing is sudden; every move Eiko & Koma make is slowly and carefully gauged so as to keep its production only just palpable. (The dominant exception to this pace is used for notable dramatic effect, when Koma repeatedly beats a hank of heavy black cloth against the floor with a shocking suddenness and vehemence.)

In effect, the methods of Eiko & Koma embrace the antithesis of the tenets of Western classical dance. Instead of alignment, their body language is predicated on an insistent display of angles; often it seems that every joint in their bodies is worked so as to take its attendant flesh and bone into any direction but a predictable one. Instead of directness of presentation by means of maximal verticality of stance, Eiko & Koma use their angularity and nonstop, evenly graded slow-motion to keep their work actively shadowed and its images intriguingly elusive.

And yet, Eiko & Koma honor a classical sensibility. Their vocabulary of angles, shadows, and nonclimactic impetus is built solidly out of a reworking of the factors they have chosen to counteract. Ultimately, there is nothing arbitrary, casual, or imbalanced in *By the River*. These performers' physical ability to hold their skewed poses and to graduate their logic of effacement is so solidly poised, it keeps their impact artful and dreamlike, rather than literal and chaotic. For all its Eastern character and iconography, *By the River* resonates with universally mythic images, not the least of which echo directly to the Christian Renaissance. From her entrance into the piece, Eiko bears a striking resemblance to the figure of Eve in Masaccio's great fresco *Expulsion From Paradise*, both in her posturing and from her chalk-dry surface color. Koma, from his appearances clothed in a gray hair shirt and usually situated on the floorcloth's indication of the title's river, harks back to images of John the Baptist and St. Christopher.

In the end, Eiko & Koma have replayed a classic Sisyphian drama, in terms at once universal and personal. *By the River* shows us that overwhelming, powerful, outside forces exist everywhere, and that just as overwhelming and powerful forces exist inside the artist as counterbalance. Artists such as Eiko & Koma make a case for art in their works of art, and I can't imagine reading any words that would make their poetic case more eloquently. ■