

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

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

Reservations: 255-5793

Dance: Eiko and Koma

By JACK ANDERSON

THE collaboratively choreographed dances of Eiko and Koma have never been action-packed spectacles. Rather, each work by these Japanese dancers has contained only a few carefully chosen images evoking the forces of nature and the struggles of life. One of the sparest of all their productions is "By the River," which they presented Tuesday night at the Kitchen. Watching it, one occasionally even feared that the new, 55-minute piece would become choreographically uneventful, rather than economical. Nevertheless, the dancers' intense concentration made it ultimately compelling.

Films of burning candles were projected on a tilted backdrop that looked as if it were made of small stones. Curving across the stage was a strip of light that, thanks to Blu's imaginative lighting designs, might well have been the river of life. And to this river came struggling people.

Koma was robed. Eiko was nude. Yet no great choreographic distinctions were made between them. The long hair of both sometimes obscured their faces, and both often turned their faces away from the audience so that instead of being specific suffering people, they seemed archetypes of suffering. As for the nudity, never once did it symbolize sexual allure. Rather, it emphasized that beneath our outward trappings, we are all frail and vulnerable.

When Eiko fell helplessly on her back, Koma inched closer to her. But,

instead of rescuing her, he moved past her, as if to imply that in this world the needy are not inevitably helped. Later, when he slammed a folded cloak against the ground as if attacking another person, his actions were a reminder that people can be violent as well as indifferent.

Eventually, the dancers grasped each other. But their union was not to last. Moving along the river of light, she kept trying to cling to him, only to lose him again and again as if they were perpetually re-enacting the Greek myth of Orpheus, who failed to rescue his beloved Eurydice from Hades.

In the final scene, Eiko stretched out on the floor and Koma slowly drew a black cloak across her. Just as one assumed this was an image of death, she moved. And then one suspected that the river these beings had found was a river of life, death and rebirth. One also suspected that if they were going to be reborn, their new life would be as harsh as their old.

The taped accompaniment, created by the dancers, was filled with faintly echoing sounds. One almost fancied one was hearing droplets of water falling for centuries inside a vast cave. When the performance was over, dancegoers were given pamphlets containing prints by Josef Krysiak and poems written by Eiko and Koma with the assistance of Irene Oppenheim. One poem concluded:

*The river runs black.
I have walked long
but cannot see the other side*

Once again, Eiko and Koma gave the impression that they confronted eternity in their choreography.

The New York Times

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