

Review/**Dance**

Injecting Drama Into the Meditation

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

Molissa Fenley presented two vibrant premieres on Thursday night in a program that opened a two-week season at the Kitchen (512 West 19th Street, west of 10th Avenue, Chelsea). "Tilliboyo-Escalay" and "Witches' Float" have a welcome new dramatic edge that tempers the extreme meditative tone of Ms. Fenley's recent repertory.

The first work reverts to her earlier high dynamics, whereas "Witches' Float" has an intense ritualism as the choreographer, her face and bare chest in red body paint, engages in a silent dialogue with four inanimate figures, all female nudes by the sculptor Kiki Smith. Typically, Ms. Fenley's choice of music explores the international new-music scene from America to Africa.

The current season is a mini-retrospective of recent pieces and this first bill included two familiar solos, "Place" and "The Floor Dances," Philip Glass, at the piano, and Ms. Fenley are to repeat their joint hit performance of last January in "Provenance Unknown" on Oct. 16; members of the Bill T. Jones-Arnie Zane Dance Company will join her in "Esperanto" (Oct. 13, Oct. 14 and Oct. 17; there are no performances on Monday and Tuesday).

"Tilliboyo-Escalay," which consists of two related dances, began with Ms. Fenley, in a white wrap-around skirt over a brown leotard and tights, plunging headlong into both the movement and the music.

For Molissa Fenley, jaunty new movements, to a new sort of music.

The latter, jaunty in its plucked sounds, was a compelling, lively work for the kora, an African string instrument, by the Gambian composer Foday Musa Suso, who collaborates frequently with Herbie Hancock.

Mr. Suso has called this composition "Sunset," but David Moodey's bright lighting, coming after his deliberate obscurity in the older solos, was all high noon. Ms. Fenley's choreography, too, was at a dynamic peak, covering large amounts of space, lending a folk-dance flavor to her signature movements: arm flinging and palm flexing, whipping turns and the final snake-hipped undulation.

"Escalay," the second section, begins with the unexpected entrance of a male dancer: Christopher Mattox, dressed in a costume identical to Ms. Fenley's (designed by Gabriel Berry). More austere in his demeanor and very tall, he throws himself into a mirror dance with Ms. Fenley, acting as her enlarged reflection. While her movement is carved into space, his is tinged with a balletic smoothness, and the choreography, in fact, ex-

pands into ballet's plunging arabesques and skipping chassés.

The dancers, for all their contrasts, make a striking pair and the choreography sweeps them in and out of unison, with true partnering held down to a few fleeting moments. The music that finally brings them together is "Waterwheel" by Hamza El Din, an Egyptian composer whose specialty is lutelike oud. The music and dancing take on a trancelike air; the performers strike up matching poses, recalling Indian statuary, two halves of a whole.

"Witches' Float" forsakes this exciting energy, but it has an eye-riveting focused performance that banks on its sense of mystery. Ms. Smith's sculpture consists of a suspended silver figure, a white plaster female statue standing at a tilt and two others slightly raised in a lying position.

Into this possible tomb and shrine, Ms. Fenley, hair cropped close, red torso and face glowing in Ray Caton's lighting, wanders in, while Alvin Lucier's sustained electronic chord suggests an eternity.

The choreography has the flattened, hingelike arms and pliés of Ms. Fenley's contemplative solos. Here, however, her focus, grandiloquent in its concentration, is directed outward. Acolyte and priest, she works up to approaching the standing statue and even puts her arm around it. There is a sense of nameless ritual as the worshiper, through willed power, reaches a godly state.