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## Even After All This Time, Attitude Still Abounds

What would Karole Armitage have said 30 years ago if told that France would someday name her a Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters? Would her

### DANCE REVIEW

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punk or her ballerina side have come out? Wednesday night at the Kitchen she was all smiles and politeness while receiving the insignia from Kareem Rispal, the cultural counselor of the French Embassy. The brief ceremony followed "Think Punk," an Armitage Gone! Dance performance celebrating the three decades since Ms. Armitage's first New York season. It's been 23 years since Vanity Fair dubbed her the "punk ballerina"; how those monikers stick.

The dances that preceded the award, of course, were not at all polite. Watching Ms. Armitage push and pull at classical ballet, I am always reminded of hearing a ballet teacher admonishing his young male students to be careful, when lifting their partners, not to display the girls' crotches in a vulgar manner. Decorum, please.

For Ms. Armitage, toying with this idea of vulgarity is a large part of the point. Everywhere you are slammed against aggressively turned out and splayed legs, daring you to blush at blasé displays of sexual power; if female ballet dancers are flowers, as George Balanchine said, then these are unapologetic Venus' flytraps. And their men aren't quite the attentive gardeners, either.

In "Drastic-Classicism" (1981), waves of louche dancers, clad in ripped, sleek black costumes by Peter Speliopoulos and Karen Young, ricochet off Rhys Chatham's gorgeously unrelenting rock score, performed onstage by a drummer and four guitarists. Loose pockets of inactivity float within a taut structure. The work is full of attitude, and attitude positions, as Ms. Armitage, much like her colleague William Forsythe, underlines how easily the two can coexist. Nobody, after all, swaggers like a woman in point shoes.

This idea is built into the Jimi Hendrix score for "Wild Thing"

*Armitage Gone! Dance performs through March 14 at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 255-5793, thekitchen.org.*



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIN BAIANO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Members of Armitage Gone! Dance performing in "Drastic-Classicism" (1981) at the Kitchen.



Left, Luke Manley and Megumi Eda in Ms. Armitage's "Watteau Duets" (1985). Right, Matthew Prescott and Kristina Michelle Bethel in her "Wild Thing" (1987), set to music by Jimi Hendrix.

(1987), a pelvic-grinding duet for the marvelously slinky Kristina Michelle Bethel and Matthew Prescott. Mr. Prescott emerges, along with a passel of heart-shaped silver balloons, from Jeff Koons's enormous black leather heart-shaped box, like some deliciously warped version of a Candygram. Physically the two dance together, in a rich stew that includes ballet, rock and even some Broadway touches — but they are performing, shamelessly, for an audience, not each other.

Ms. Armitage goes much farther in exploding the pas de deux

### Armitage Gone! Dance The Kitchen

in "The Watteau Duets," from 1985. On Wednesday it was danced by the wonderfully severe Megumi Eda, who seemed always just shy of devouring her somewhat overmatched partner, Luke Manley. This deconstruction of classical form, like all these pieces, seemed at times innocent and uncomplicated (funny how punks age) and not quite so alive as the mischievous play between Matt Mottel and Kevin

Shea of the band Talibam!, whose raucous performance of David Linton's witty collage score, "The Simpleton's Guide to the World's Greatest Music," was one of the night's highlights.

The program's lowlight, sadly, came during an excerpt from Ms. Armitage's new "Mashup," set to Daniel Iglesia's mash-up of a score. An unrelenting stream of choreography that yelled and yelled but didn't say much, the work, for all its energy, seemed airless. It was an unfortunate ending for an evening dedicated to a choreographer who has so pushed to let the air in.