

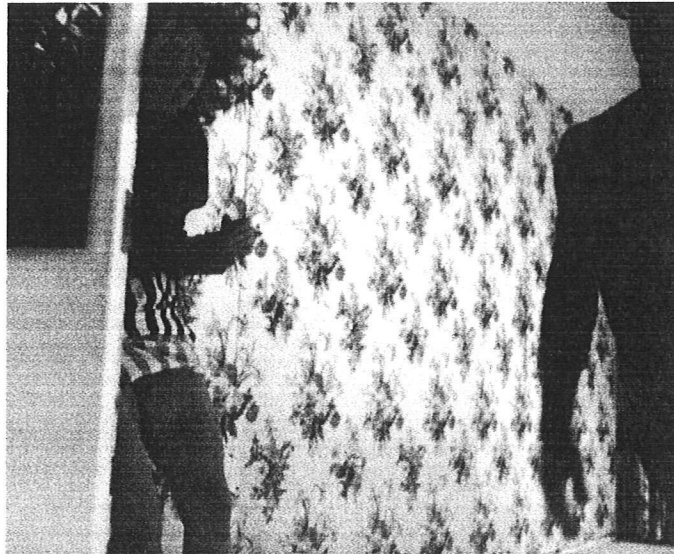
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Double trouble

Sarah Michelson scoffs at theatrical convention with a new two-part, two-venue piece **By Gia Kourlas**

Sarah Michelson likes to break traditional choreographic rules in the course of making a dance. Armed with a vivid imagination and a clear realization of her own taste, she's driven by a compulsion to create a wholly original theatrical picture. Michelson's work—a bold new world of repetitive movement in an installationlike setting—is a marvel of intellectual and visceral power. Her dances are always marked by contradictions; even though the action appears raw, in reality she controls every second with meticulous direction. Over the past year and a half, she has churned out three compelling pieces: *Group Experience* at P.S. 122, which garnered her a Bessie; *The Experts*, commissioned by Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project; and *Grivdon @ the Grivdon*, the most impressive of them all, performed last spring at the Kitchen and Jacob's Pillow.

Her latest dance, *Shadowmann*, set to a score by the wry Mike Iveson and featuring articulate, juicy dancing by downtown stars like Parker Lutz and Greg Zuccolo, exemplifies the new standard that Michelson has set for all choreog-



SHADOWDANCING Michelson offers a peek at her downtown extravaganza.

raphers: It never pays to go halfway. Described as a portrait of "medieval Bauhaus," *Shadowmann* will be performed in two full-length parts, the first during a run at the Kitchen and the second, later, at P.S. 122 (the \$30 ticket will gain admission to both). Over brunch at an East Village bistro, Michelson seemed fairly relaxed for someone who freely acknowledged that her project might end in disaster.

"It's a week before we open, and I am excited by the fact that I don't know if I'm going to pull this off."

Time Out New York: How did you manage to get two shows at once?

Sarah Michelson: I got popular last year. I did a number on White Oak Dance Project. [Laughs] When I did *Group Experience*, it

even if my work sucks, probably people are going to try to come and see it. Dean and Mark both had an awareness that this was the season, and I guess they wanted it to be at their theaters.

TONY: Did you come up with the concept of two parts for one dance?

SM: Yes. Dean said that he would be open to that, so we went to Mark, and they got very excited to collaborate. But each theater didn't want to *not* be first, and that took some negotiating.

TONY: Did you decide that?

SM: I did. I didn't want it to graduate from small to big. I really wanted it to start in the huge space at

the Kitchen and go to the tiny space at P.S. 122. At first, I didn't want people to feel imprisoned by having to pay \$30 for both shows, but now that I am closer to *Shadowmann*, I have much more confidence about what my idea was in the first place. It is two parts of one show. I will be disappointed if people don't see both.

TONY: Why does it matter?

SM: The first part is like an architectural imprint of an idea, a philosophy of performance—a

grand, operatic statement. The second part is like an undoing of that. You see a machine and then it unravels, really up close. It might fail, but honestly, I don't care. The part that I feel the most excited about is the fact that I don't want to get stuck in a system where I'm making a new show in a theater each year. I don't

kids perform parts from *Grivdon*. I wanted to bring that work into it, but I didn't want us to do it. I'm really excited about the tension that the performance quality creates between us and the children.

TONY: You focus extensively on performance style; dancers may look casual, but they're not. What is your aim with *Shadowmann*?

SM: For *Group Experience*, we were in a really tiny theater, very close to the audience. We were cultivating the idea that we could act as ourselves inside of the performance environment. That hasn't gone away, but now, on top of that, we're cultivating a more conventional performance style that you might expect to see on a proscenium stage. I don't know how it will work for someone who doesn't know us. But we're going to an extreme place. It's a hard dance to do.

TONY: You're keeping many of the details of *Shadowmann* secret. Why?

SM: Partly because I'm a total control freak. I also feel like a weird, townie local artist—it has something to do with that. The shows themselves aren't just about dance steps, they're about the people who are doing them and where. If it works, it'll be a little bit magical. I don't know how much longer I can keep it up, but I really like surprises, and I think that undoing the expectations of your own theatrical community is important.

TONY: Does it make it easier to take big risks with this season because you've had so much success so fast?

SM: I've always been this way. Years ago, when I made my first piece, it was really successful. When I look at the video now, I can see that it's cute but really dumb. I could have ended up making work that was derivative of that first piece for years. I guess somehow I knew that I wasn't done. There was something in me that knew that I needed time for my ideas to mature. But that restlessness—that not wanting to follow the same system that everyone else does—has never changed.

Shadowmann is at the Kitchen (Part 1, Thursday 27 through April 5) and P.S. 122 (Part 2, April 9 through 27).

TONY: You always transform the environment of a theater. At P.S. 122, you're covering the stage in the same white carpet you used in *Group Experience*. Why?

SM: I want to acknowledge the reason why these two shows came to me. I'm also having five