

THE KITCHEN

Video Music Dance Performance Film Literature

Reviews/**Theater**

Sleepwalking Through a Too Brief Childhood

By MEL GUSSOW

With its gigantic watch faces and other oversized objects, Huck Snyder's evocative scenery for "Maybe It's Cold Outside" looks like a companion landscape to that in Maurice Sendak's storybook "In the Night Kitchen." The stage setting for this show (written, directed and choreographed by John Kelly, in collaboration with his company) soon becomes a field for the play of Mr. Kelly's imagination, as the audience is trans-

Maybe It's Cold Outside

Direction and choreography by John Kelly; set design by Huck Snyder; film by Anthony Chase; costume design by Katherine Maurer; lighting design by Stan Pressner; music by Bach, Bellini, Elgar, Arvo Part and Stravinsky; produced by Liz Dunn. Presented by the Kitchen and John Kelly and Company. At the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street.

WITH: Vivian Trimble, Byron Suber, Marleen Menard, Kyle deCamp and Mr. Kelly

ported into a world of shadowy mood and memory. At the heart of the talismanic performance piece (at the Kitchen) are Mr. Kelly's reflections about growing up, about the pleasures and problems — and the brevity — of childhood.

The scene opens in an elementary schoolroom where the actors, dressed in uniforms, squirm in their seats. With a clownish agility, they compete for attention and positions of priority. They also pursue their feelings of sexuality. Then the students hopscotch to a higher grade to study French. What follows is a mischievous dance for dunces, a fantasia in which the director demonstrates his quirky sense of comedy.

In the middle of the show, the performers (a harmonious cast of five headed by Mr. Kelly himself) are glimpsed in outline behind individual screens preparing themselves for a night's slumber. Soon they are swept into a dream within the dream play, culminated by Mr. Kelly's emergence to sing an aria from "La Sonnambula" by Bellini. His rapturous falsetto lifts the music into the already etherized atmosphere.

Sleepwalking is endemic to Mr. Kelly's directorial vision. One of his earlier pieces was "Diary of a Somnambulist." There is something trancelike — and entrancing — about Mr. Kelly's theater, in which he asks the audience to embark with him on an elliptical journey to an unsettling destination. As is his style, he melds various performance arts into a media mélange. In this case, there is a short film by Anthony Chase as well as an accompanying chamber concert of music played on the cello by Tomas Ulrich.

"Maybe It's Cold Outside" is an open-ended anthology, in contrast to other fully structured Kelly pieces, like "Pass the Blutwurst, Bitte" (his musings on the life of Egon Schiele) and "Find Your Way Home" (in

which he used novel forms to retell the Orpheus myth). The new show's episodic, improvisatory nature will allow the director to expand or to distill it further.

Beneath the offbeat comedy there is an underlying seriousness, formally asserted toward the close of the show. Hooded stagehands who have been silently moving the scenery are suddenly caught up in the action. They fall to the ground like projectiles. At the same time on the screen are seen iconographic indications of numerous fatalities. Death has entered Mr. Kelly's dominion, as the beguiling innocence of youth is replaced by an adult melancholy. At its end, the play begins to explore the coldness beyond the door of the play room.

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