

DANCE IN REVIEW

War Stories:

Movements of a Nightmare

*School of Hard Knocks
The Kitchen*

Yoshiko Chuma and her School of Hard Knocks are known for choreographed collisions. But very little happens in Ms. Chuma's new "Footprints of War," performed at the Kitchen on Friday night. And that, perhaps, is the point of this eerie antiwar dance.

Five women come and go for most of the 75-minute piece in a setting that suggests both a summer beach and a ship's promenade. They are overseen by a busy stage manager (Sharon Hayes) who gradually becomes a part of their scenario.

One woman (Vicki Shick) droops languidly in a deck chair. Another (Kasumi Takahashi) kicks fitfully at a soccer ball and a third (Rocky Bornstein) moves restlessly about the stage.

The other two (Ms. Chuma, replacing the injured Hisako Horikawa, and DD Dorvillier) absorb the boiling tensions about them.

Bodies race and tumble and occasionally seem about to fight. Chairs are shifted continually and sometimes violently. A little ship sails across the stage. The women reconstruct the setting in miniature. The sounds of children at play well up from a radio. The mood is ominously lazy.

Something terrible is about to happen. Four musicians (Robert Black, Mark Stuart, Katie Lansdale and Mary Wooten), who appear late in the piece, might almost be playing as a ship goes down. And in the final moments the radio broadcasts the voice of the Enola Gay pilot recounting his successful bombing of Hiroshima as the women sit listlessly in their deck chairs.

The account is as flat and measured as the pace of "Footprints of War," whose progress is numbingly slow at times. But the piece does make a point about the horrible banality of war, a point underscored by a chilling letter from Macedonia, which is handed to the departing audience and describes the plight of Kosovar refugees.

Ms. Chuma was fortunate in her sensitive and ingenious collaborators. The score was by Alvin Curran. The witty cardboard sets and delicately colored costumes were by Tom Burckhardt and Gabriel Berry. Pat Dignan designed the lighting.

JENNIFER DUNNING



Tom Brazil

Kasumi Takahashi in "Footprints of War," presented at the Kitchen.