

# DANCE

Preview

## A night at the improv

In *The Glint*, Jennifer Monson abandons choreography and goes with the flow

By Gia Kourlas

**D**ance improvisation is a lot like poetry. When it's bad, it's unbearable. But when it's good—as when Jennifer Monson is the dancer—it's inspiring. In Monson's newest work, *The Glint*, she and Chrysa Parkinson attempt to achieve transcendental states through highly physical movement. For the piece, Monson taps into her internal energy and projects it outward, and the results are explosive.

"It sounds really New Age-y," Monson admits. "I'm always embarrassed to talk about it, but energy is the concept of this piece. I'm in search of certain energetic states that consume me and take over my body when I feel like I'm most in tune with my dancing."

Monson is a voluptuous dancer; whether she's performing her own work or another's, she exudes fearlessness. Jumping on other dancers, slamming her body against walls or crashing onto the floor without warning, Monson's metamorphosis onstage is unnerving—she completely loses her inhibitions. For the audience, it's a wild, crazy ride.

Her decision to work with Parkinson, a lean, lyrical and almost balletic dancer, marks a change in Monson's direction. "I knew I needed something different, and I think I was intrigued with using someone who didn't have the same information I did," she explains. "Chrysa is a little bit of a blank slate for me. The process is very intimate; there's a lot of trust involved."

The rehearsal pro-

cess has been particularly strenuous—instead of developing set choreography, Monson and Parkinson experiment with various movement exercises. "We'll take a specific movement and build upon it repetitively, rhythmically or from an emotional character," says Monson. "I think it helps to peel away learned patterns."

Along with Monson and Parkinson, musician Guy Yarden, the other improviser in the piece, plays the electric violin. The rehearsal process has been just as rigorous for him—usually, when a composer provides music for a dance, he attends a couple of rehearsals and writes the music on his own. "We meet three times a week," Yarden says. "I don't work on this outside of the studio. For me, that's incredibly unusual. I also haven't played this much in years; I might pick up an instrument here and there, but I'm in the habit of recording for projects."

The piece is contained and structured by a line of warrior-like dancers. Wearing hip-hugging sweatpants ingeniously covered by

yarn (they look like grass skirts or the feathered legs of Matthew Bourne's maleswans), Sarah Michelson, Miquel Gutierrez, Joanne Nerenberg, Robert Bingham and Jennifer Allen link arms, wiggle their hips and roll and jump in unison.

"Originally, I thought that an hour and a half of just the three of us would be unbearable, so I added in these line dances," says Monson. "I really love them: They're cute and strong and totally the opposite of the improvisation element. They're inspired by the Balkan folk dancing I did when I was a teenager."

Monson began dancing when she was five, and was strongly influenced by her creative-dance teacher, whose studio overlooked orange groves in the foothills of Southern California. "I have such intense memories of her class. It was one of my favorite things to do. Then she died of cancer, and I started taking modern dance and ballet, and I thought, Gee, this isn't right. Eventually, I realized that I could keep improvising."

She now realizes that the cross-country running she did as a teen was probably her introduction to what she's attempting to do in *The Glint*—finding a transcendental state through endurance. But she believes her connection to dance is much deeper. "History is so revisionist, but I think I've always had a strong sense that I responded to dance as a way to express myself. I was really shy," Monson says. "Dance was one area where I didn't have to be."

**Jennifer Monson performs at the Kitchen Wednesday 18 through November 28.**

**BALANCING ACT** Jennifer Monson, Chrysa Parkinson and violinist Guy Yarden experiment with improvisation in *The Glint*.



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