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DANCE REVIEW

On stage, audience participation is required

PRONE. Choreographed by John Jasperse. Through Dec. 17 at The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St., Manhattan. Tickets \$15. Call 212-255-5793 or visit www.thekitchen.org.

BY APOLLINAIRE SCHERR

John Jasperse's generation of experimental choreographers — the most interesting since Merce Cunningham began rolling dice 50 years ago — understands that if a dance proceeds along the usual path toward catharsis, the feeling it ignites will be predictable, too.

Their meticulously crafted pieces begin diffidently, not with feeling but with ideas that circulate above the work, only later to descend without warning as both emotion and sensation. These low-profile choreographers in their 40s and early 50s know how to incarnate thought, leaving us actually feeling illuminated.

The audience members for Jasperse's "Prone" spend half the time on mattresses on their

backs (the other half in chairs). But lest we confuse this event with a 1960s-style love-in, the high-tech air mattresses are arranged in narrow rows, not strewn about as in a hippie's pad. Before entering the performance space, we check our coats, bags and shoes, as if submitting to airport security. An instruction card explains how we should lie on the mattresses: no slopping over the edges.

The dance's conceptual gizmos are equally fussy. The mirrors hanging high above the mattresses may serve a practical purpose — to allow the prone on-lookers to watch the dancers even when they sink out of view. They also act to remind us that this work is an *experiment in perception*. Starting out in a chair on the sidelines, I felt a cerebral chill.

Slowly, though, "Prone" warms up. It patiently establishes a climate of feeling, as music often does. The three dancers

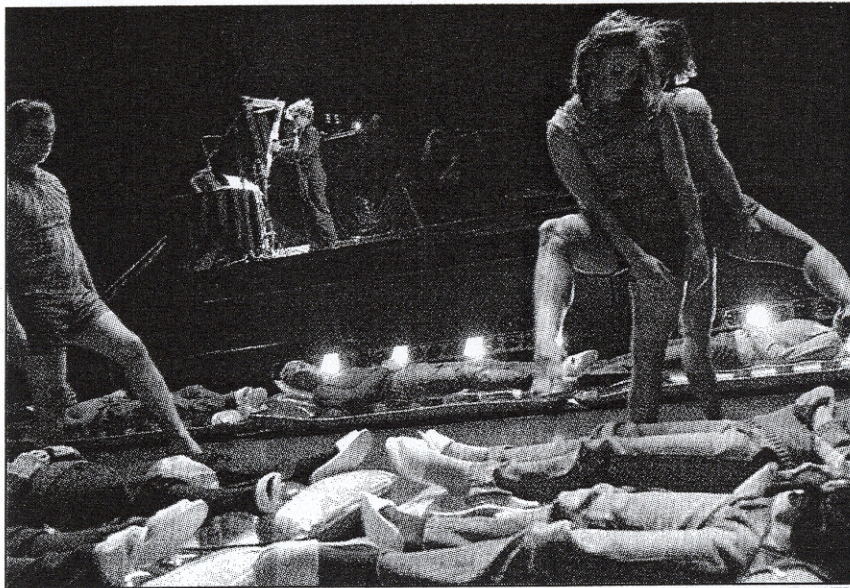


PHOTO BY JULIETA CERVANTES

Audience members lie on their backs on mattresses in "Prone."

— Luciana Achugar, Levi Gonzalez and Eleanor Hullihan — travel back and forth over the mattresses in passages of pendulous motion, with the weight of their limbs carrying them forward. They begin to seem tenacious but limited in

their choices — and fragile, like the inflated plastic bags that they kick across the space (and that, in one hilarious moment, billow between our legs). They also seem familiar.

Anytime a person leans over another's body, she becomes

not only imposing but also close enough to seem less distinct from the other. The dancers whisk their legs within inches of our noses, suspend their limbs over our stomachs, rub their cheeks against our cheeks, stuff their outer-garments under our mattresses and settle in amorphous tangles by our sides.

At one point, Gonzalez hoists Hullihan onto his shoulder next to a cluster of hanging lamps. She slips the budding flower of a lampshade around her waist and, with a large glass bulb dangling between her legs, dances delicately across the floor amid the reclining spectators. Carrying the only light, she illuminates the whole piece — how its delicacy and comedy extend to us, whose glow is also golden and easily extinguished.

Apollinaire Scherr is a freelance writer.