

Last Gasp of Romance

By Burt Supree

EDOUARD LOCK AND DANCERS. At the Kitchen (October 30 to November 2). *Lili Marlene in the Jungle*.

You hear a mournful, droning accordion. Throughout the piece it comes and goes, sometimes with snatches of familiar songs (a bit of "Lili Marlene," three notes from "But Where Is Your Heart?"). The walls of the Kitchen are covered with black plastic, a runway edged with light bulbs is filled with dirt. When the lights brighten, we see Montreal choreographer Edouard Lock lying on the floor; several times he brings his body partway up, points his index finger to the ceiling, shivers his head and upper torso, and sinks back. He lets his head bob—like one of those dashboard toys—till it comes into balance. A bare-breasted woman who has been standing in the back throws herself over his shoulder where she hangs, for a moment, limply. Then she grasps Lock by his belt and lets him dangle. In this first section, Lock and two women are bare-

chested and, oddly, it seems more democratic than erotic. They wear pants with knee pads that cinch the legs tightly. Later, they switch to green T-shirts, then white, and red.

A woman runs in and slides across the floor. The movement occurs in spurts, erupting in a generally lazy, "decadent" atmosphere where the dancers (and the accordionist) wait on wooden chairs in a semi-dark corner of the stage area. Someone jumps around with a shivery, shimmyming motion, and throws herself on the floor. Lays there. Gets up.

The dancers are often like puppets, or masterless androids from some world we prefer to picture in the future or the past, creatures who are erratically frenetic and desperate in their activity, but who have no purpose and whose experiences have no internal quality at all—nothing registers. But they can't quit. They get up and fall down, live and die, live and die, and it's all the same.

Lock's *Lili Marlene in the Jungle* is in 13 sections, with brief blackouts between, in a style that's slouchy and depleted most of the time, though frequently the dancers fling and shudder and run and keel over. Another man (Louis Guillemette) saunters slowly in, shivers his upper body, points his finger. (The pointing finger at first seems to point at something, then it seems neutral, or like a kind of rhythmic accent in pop dancing; enfeebled, as it usually is,

it becomes a sinister, comic comment, turned to the temple, a pistol. But it never has the force of an accusation.) His walk is coldly erotic, and many of the movements and other elements of the piece are distinctly sexual in an empty, necrophiliac sort of way: zombie-like come-hither gestures; kissing sounds and kisses for oneself; severely restricted, swivel-hipped walks; an occasional direct stare that says to anyone, "I'm hot for you," but which also communicates an aloofness and a blank, passive, uncaring quality that's never intense enough to become hostility.

The dancers frequently dance together, handle each other, but the contact is purely manual. The movement vocabulary is eclectic and wide-ranging. In a bright beam of light, Lock holds a woman by her belt: she leans away in an arch, swings around slowly, heavily, gradually pulling them both off balance. Two women do a long, frenetic tap dance, flinging their arms and legs wide with a kind of helter-skelter dislocation. A girl in a white T-shirt undulates her arms, skips wildly up and back, vibrates and pants, runs, throws herself splat on the floor, skips back. One woman swiftly swings her extended leg through second, through sort-of-arabesque, and curls it under herself as she buckles and collapses over it. Lock sidles backwards, sinking just-so-far into his hip with each step: each step the shell of an

invitation, a taunt. He has an exquisitely measured way of marking or indicating a gesture to give it the utmost cynical thrust.

It's like the last gasp of disco—people are used up, isolated twitches of movement are all that's left. The dancers appear to bounce, jiggle, vibrate with the kind of haywire energy that exceeds the ability of exhausted muscles to contain it. They're victims of the same ailment. Maybe they've all died of chic but don't know it.

The dancers are excellent (the women are Monique Giard, Manon Levac, and Miryam Moutillet) and the piece's theatricality is beautifully controlled. The bitersweet, now-and-then music of accordionist Rober Racine adds immeasurably to the atmosphere and texture. But the piece seems overlong in some sections, partly because the inexpressive movements don't gain in complexity or shading by the ways they're linked up or overlaid. And repetition produces no intoxication. What is intriguing and provoking is how and when and where they stop and start.

After all that emotional deprivation, Marlene Dietrich's singing of "Lili Marlene" washes in, blurring at first with the sound of the accordion. You don't know what you're hearing. Then the warm ache of that voice in the darkness becomes just about unbearable. ■

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