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## Primitive Mysteries

**T**he exhaustive questionnaire the Kitchen urges you to fill out in its lobby these days asks why you come to see its shows. A couple of the multiple-choice replies suggest extravagant ambitions on both sides of the nonexistent curtain: you expect, say, to see stuff that's drastically new or of potential historic significance. Me, I'll settle for very interesting, and that's what I found RoseAnne Spradlin's concert (April 18 through 21) to be.

Her new *Last Day of Summer* begins with a grainy black-and-white film of her and Steve Cross on a diving

platform in the middle of a lake, the two, after deliberate consideration, plunging by turns into the apparently cold water—fully clothed, then partly stripped, then nude. It's one part blissful summer camp, one part postmodern absurdity. Live, we get Spradlin solo, charging the Kitchen's high-ceilinged, desolate space with weird, intense passions: strange desires, fears with no names, chronic frustrations and thwartings. Forceful, full-bodied gestures issued in eccentric rhythms call them into being, as does a concentration that's both fierce and dogged, turned inward as if the audience weren't even there to be wooed or wowed. Multiply this a few times, and you've got something like what Martha Graham's early concerts seem to have been: bizarre, determined, impossible to take your eyes off or to forget, the ravings—call them art, if you will—of a woman with a vision and a mission. You look on appalled, intrigued, engaged.

The diving platform makes it into the live, landlocked, segment of *Summer*; Spradlin "swims" on it, belly down, then turns to lie supine, hank of hair falling over the edge, limbs askew. She might be de- ➤➤

➤➤ tailing the physical and mental sensations of a person undergoing a near-death experience or a major, complex operation. Then she stands on the platform, as if to dive off, but there's no protective water to buoy her up, only empty space—the (choreographer's) ultimate threat. Somehow she takes the plunge, and our last sight before the lights die is of her pale legs upended, the rest of her—including the fingers desperately gripping the edge of her support—so murky in the dark, it might as well already have vanished.

Two dances completed the program: a quartet called *Desire*, which seems to propose that wanting, inevitably frustrated, drives us mad, and a visually stunning duet, *Immunity*, that offers an inventory of Spradlinisms: bared breasts, wildly splayed fingers, an agitation that escalates from chronic restless fidgeting to spasmodic tremors, and a buried secret that won't let your attention go. Spradlin's acolytes, all female, are, like Graham's early collaborators, unique in their own physical temperaments and willing, effective instruments.

—TOBI TOBIAS