



Perils of modern life become a dance theme

BY DORIS DIETHER

"How can the body feel safe in an inherently unsafe world?" This is the question that RoseAnne Spradlin tackles in "Ends of Mercy," one of two works she will present this weekend at The Kitchen. "There's something about my upbringing, something that was always unspoken in my household," Spradlin said. "It seems there was always this expectation that something bad, something violent was going to happen. Not among the family members, but something from the outside. So I started tracing this. It's something that cropped up over and over again."

Spradlin grew up in Oklahoma, "a million miles away from modern dance, but they do have a hefty ballet tradition there." Her father was a lawyer and her mother worked with him and did some writing on the side. Of her three sisters, one also



gravitated toward dance, but as a teacher.

Spradlin danced

from the time she was a child, but went to the University of Oklahoma as an art major. From art she got into video art and performance art, and then back into dancing. After her Bachelor's degree, she went to Ohio University for a Master's degree in art.

"They had a very good dance department there, and a good focus on choreography, which a lot of places don't. Oklahoma was much more into ballet, and didn't really focus on a student doing his own choreography. When I started seeing work done by students I decided that's what I wanted to do. I stayed another four years in Ohio, and then I moved to New York. I've been choreographing ever since."

In 1986 Spradlin began studying with Bonnie Cohen from Massachusetts.

"I started formally studying where movement comes from," Spradlin said. "All modern dance started there at some point but a lot of people never go back to that point. They start by learning a technique -- Graham technique, Cunningham technique. Now I feel my movement comes from my own exploration. I don't feel aligned to any particular technique."

For this concert Spradlin started with this question about how somebody can feel safe in this world.

"Out of that inquiry into myself, I've



Villager photo by Brad Wilson

RoseAnne Spradlin

flowered out the different aspects of this character," Spradlin explained, "so in each section you are looking at her from a different angle. I'm dealing with this intertwining of violence and innocence. It comes out of several different personal stories.

"One was the bombing in Oklahoma City where I grew up. It struck me how, on television, people kept saying, 'How could this happen in the heartland of America? It's so unexpected.' But my own feeling was it wasn't unexpected. Around that time I also decided to interview my parents before they got any older. My father was a prisoner of war in Germany for about a year, and I had always wanted to ask him about his experience and what it was like. One of the things he told me was the once he was shot down, he had to beg for his life. That became a theme for me that I followed in my piece. There is a particular kind of loss of innocence when you have to beg for your life.

"In the piece I'm a young girl when I get to this point. It's kind of complex. I realized that, in my family, there was something unprocessed about my father's experience that had colored the whole family. Now they would call it post traumatic stress syndrome, but then they didn't have a name for it. What

does that do to people when they are faced with that kind of extreme situation? How do you unwind or heal from it? There is such a build-up of violence that it can feel like this heavy, oppressive presence for all of us. Is there anything we can do to poke some holes in that or get some space? There are the things I'm interested in. Where I actually get with it I'm not sure yet. I'll have to wait until I do it and hear what people get out of it, get some feedback on the other side of it.

"Some people have said my work tends to be dark. To me the works aren't dark, they are just stuff I'm interested in. I'm interested in the other side of that too. If you just turn over whatever seems dark, it can be really sparkly or spacious. As a performer, I'm not the type of person who likes jumping or running or leaping across the stage. But to me the works are not dark, they are just what they are.

"The other piece is a 12-minute solo I choreographed for Paige Martin, a dancer I've worked with before."

Spradlin, a Ninth St. resident since 1990, has worked at various jobs to support herself between concerts. For a time she worked in a law office on lower Fifth Ave., which pleased her father who hoped she would go to law school. She considered it, but decided against it. She also tried clothes designing and sewing, even making wedding dresses and a man's suit. She bought a computer to try her hand at graphic designing, but there was too much competition.

"Part of what I learned when I was studying body orientation to movement was healing, or hands-on work. That I do and apply it more toward movement, repatterning with people. I'm not a real physical therapist, but it's in the realm. I started doing quite a bit of teaching movement and dance. I'm a partner, with Gloria McLean and Pat Crimmins, in a studio downtown, a nice big space on Fulton St. called Squid. From time to time I teach classes down there.

"It's really sad that my parents have never seen me dance since I've been an adult except on video. Colorado is a long ways away. After this concert I'm probably going into the most terrible pit, post-partum depression. You always do that after you finish your show. Actually I'm hoping to tour this piece, especially if I can get some funding."

RoseAnne Spradlin, at The Kitchen, 512 West 19 St.; Thur.-Sun., Dec. 18-21, 8 p.m.; \$15. 255-5793.