

Irony of Intensity of Self

by Wendy Perron

Jim Self
The Kitchen
May 26-29

Jim Self places his dances in a definite and vivid context that is no less appealing for being confusing. The futuristic, the historic, and the mock scientific all make their bid amidst a fabric of non-stop choreography. One can sense, rather than see, the coexisting modes and moods that have gone into the making of these dances.

The movement in *Perpetrator* (originally commissioned by the American Dance Festival in 1982) draws heavily on the Cunningham vocabulary of large, straight-limbed steps with hurried timing. The various partnerings among the two men and two women are harsh. The dancers are mostly independent, with flurries of mutual aggressiveness interrupting solos and ensembles.

Self likes to break out of the angularity in his choreography sometimes, so he'll suddenly drop into something softer, looking like a rumpled kitten, revealing a story under the story (A friend of mine recently said it's the holes in the choreography that let you see a story.) The music, a tape by Frankie Mann, interweaves radio voices, dogs panting, and many unidentifiable sounds so that they seem like they're pushing through each other. The dense sounds come in close and recede into the distance with a telescoping quickness. The tape provides a sort of dream momentum that motivates/justifies/enforces the urgency of the dancing.

There is a moment of acute and satisfying intensity when a hidden fluorescent bulb lights up, hitting two dancers with a garrish yellow glow. They freeze, and

one of them (Teri Weksler) moves her eyes back and forth between her partner and the audience. They eye motion is coordinated with her breathing and looks like a strange mechanistic mating signal. When Self himself does this, in a blue light further upstage, he's the picture of paranoid seductiveness, though he does the eye movement with typically unman-nered calm.

The other group piece on the program was *Heaven and Earth*, which is based on sketches from Robert Wilson's opera-in-progress, *The Civil Wars*. It may be ridiculous (or ordinary) to see modern dancers wearing various Indian kachina outfits—representing eagles, crows, and designed by Christophe de Menil—but Self incorporates this ridiculousness into the piece so that it's fun while also being severe. This piece seems a more literal, and yet paler, treatment of character than the others, and doesn't have the kinetic drive of *Perpetrator*, even though A. Leroy's music is propelling and resilient. *Heaven and Earth* may need a more formal presentation than is possible at the Kitchen in order for the story that these characters enact to emerge clearly.

The "Flower Pas de Deux" from *Beehive*, a Jim Self/Frank Moore collaboration in progress, is a hilarious version of a flower getting pollinated by a worker bee. As played by Hope Gillerman and Teri Weksler, it bears resemblance to *Afternoon of a Faun*, in which the narcissism of both parties is the motive for getting together. The first we see of Gillerman as Fuschsia is a pair of ungainly legs stuck up in the air with a petal skirt swelling around her earthbound upper half. After slowly righting herself, she expertly oozes sensuality...outrageous after her comic beginning. The comedic and the

seductive parry with each other and meet in Gillerman's blase eyes, visible from behind a sharp shaggy haircut. Weksler, as the bee on point, joins her for a rhumba and then gets down to the dirty business of pollination. Fuschsia is left, apparently content, with her legs/stem sticking up in the air again.

Moore's set, lights and costumes are

an integral part of "Flower Pas de Deux": a little stump of fake, flamelike things casts a long shadow on the wall, suggesting a baroque swampy backdrop. The costume for Fuschsia, with a red star splatting out over the petal skirt and green thorny elbows, is the kind of thing in which only someone who utterly embraces the ludicrous could feel at home.

Photo by Mark Patera

