

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO
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DANCE

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Dance: Mary Overlie's 'History' Solo

By JENNIFER DUNNING

EXPOSE a leading postmodernist to the world of Diaghilev and, if it's a postmodernist of Mary Overlie's intelligence and developed sensibilities, you get a small jewel of a dance like "History."

The new solo, performed by Miss Overlie on Saturday night at the Kitchen, is motivated by an affectionate reverence for the past. It is an homage to Diaghilevian explorations into expressive, abstract dance and, in particular, to Léonide Massine, Bronslava Nijinska and Vaslav Nijinsky, choreographers of the era who investigated the possibilities of such dance. But it is likely that no one who had not lived through the more recent explorations of Merce Cunningham, the Judson Dance Theater and the experimental theater of the last two decades could have created "History."

The solo is set in part to a bouncing bit of funk-rock by Don Christensen. Miss Overlie is dressed wittily in a short, dark blue dress with a bright red, detached ruff around the neck, designed by one Morgane LeFay. But what gives the dance its real color is

the way Miss Overlie has taken such balleticisms as the bourrée, attitude and a jump up with front leg extended and back leg crooked, and extended them in an airy, space covering "modern" dance.

One is suspended in time as Miss Overlie assumes an attitude or ports de bras straight out of familiar photographs of Nijinsky and, by assuming them with such loving conviction and accuracy, makes the photographs seem to come alive in all their sensuousness. But "History" is very much of its own time.

Take, for instance, the way Miss Overlie begins the solo, walking unassumingly through one of the Kitchen's many doors into the stage space, using the uncompromisingly blank white wall to fall away from, at last, into opening, fluting attitude pivots that send her out into the dark through another door. Or take her buoyant runs across the studio and past its obscuring pillars, or the way another wall leads her into a crab-wise series of gradually deepening pliés that suggest, with wit, the earthiness of that simple ballet move that made it so expressive in modern dance.

Then there is the way Miss Overlie carries one little ballet barre exercise to a wonderfully daring but logical

end, raising her foot to her knee and swiveling it in so that the raised knee dips luxuriously, then suddenly extending the leg, flat footed, through that imaginary loop. It all occurs along a gentle, space-crossing continuum broken only by an occasional stop, eyes closed and hand held to the diaphragm, as if she were righting herself briefly between past and present.

"History" was performed on two programs Saturday, which also included Miss Overlie's "Hero," an ambitious group piece set to a score by Laurie Anderson and Mr. Christensen. Though overlong, it contained some pointed little movement jokes and at its best used its large ensembles like washes of color floating over a canvas.

The good company also performed "Painter's Dream," a witty, beautiful dance, whose mood and look live up to the title, and the tiresome "Wallpaper." Miss Overlie likes to call her dances "abstract narratives," a term that suggests their blend of plotlessness and acute dramatic gesture. In "Wallpaper," however, the "narrative" veers into literalness and, poised there, ends up in a busy neverland.