

DANCE REVIEW

Testing The Limits Of Boredom, Intelligently

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Jonathan Burrows proceeded to test the outer limits of boredom and exhaustion on Thursday night at The Kitchen, then prodded his audience into thinking about exactly what those limits were. The results, paradoxically enough, were invigorating.

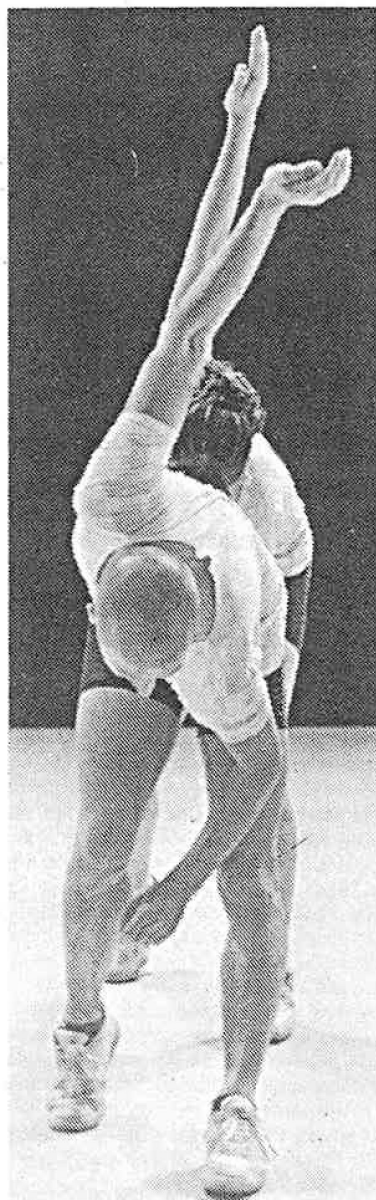
The Jonathan Burrows Group is the second entry in the provocative "Dancing in the Isles: British Invasion '97" festival. Mr. Burrows, who worked with the Royal Ballet and the pioneering English experimentalist Rosemary Butcher, has the rather cheeky cool but not the self-consciousness of some New York post-modernist dance. He and his four dancers are quick, smart movers. One suspects he is also a closet physicist and engineer.

The dancers might simply be atoms moving across a floating field of celestial light in "The Stop Quartet" and "Quintet." But there is a knotty, prodigious intelligence behind that motion. Mr. Burrows juggles a rich assortment of ideas about the quality and context of movement.

In "The Stop Quartet," two men engage in a long, stop-and-start series of brief connected duets before being joined toward the end by one woman and then another. The duets are filled with sharp pivots and looping, twisting motions that seldom stray far, governed or ordained, it seems, by the broken grid lines on which they dance. With the women's arrival, the dancers gradually look like chess pieces traveling much more freely across the stage.

The intermittent piano noodling of the score by Kevin Volans and Matteo Fargion becomes a shimmering electronic hum embedded with a few bird chirps and finally the faintest suggestion of a human shout. The 45-minute piece is dry and unyielding, but one never completely loses faith. It is clear that Mr. Burrows knows exactly what he is doing. There is something worthwhile going on here.

That faith is almost broken at moments in "Quintet," a 16-minute piece set to a score and text by Tom Johnson. All the buried questions of "The Stop Quartet" are enunciated here by a dancer who creates the



Tom Brazil

Jonathan Burrows, front, and Fin Walker dancing at The Kitchen.

score by slowly and deliberately circling a handsome steel tree of chimes, which he taps. Maddeningly distracting questions follow in the pauses between taps, delivered in an even more annoyingly deliberate voice, about the effects of music or silence and movement on each other and the audience.

A sweeping line of four dancers breaks intermittently into illegible individual scrawls and rugged partnering. The grids have disappeared. There is a heady comparative freedom and simplicity to this dance. But Mr. Burrows's plotting is just as intricate and precise a marvel.

His company also included Henry Montes, Fin Walker, Ragnhild Olsen and Dana Fouras. Michael Hulls was the lighting designer.