

# Getting Acquainted

Jonathan Burrows Group

The Kitchen

October 30 through November 2

**BY DEBORAH JOWITT**

THOSE OF US WHO FREQUENTED the wilder shores of dance during the late '60s and early '70s remember works that were like games whose rules we learned on the run; we'd find ourselves counting rigorously minimal phrases or anticipating results inherent in the structure. *Stop Quartet* by Jonathan Burrows, another out-of-the-ordinary British choreographer, is a simulacrum of those task dances. The floor, lit by Michael Hulls, becomes an irregular but tidy design, white sticks of light on a blue ground. Burrows and Henry Montes treat it as a game board. One steps across a line and regards the other challengingly; one strikes out in space, then pauses, as if waiting for the other to catch up. They're friendly, amused. Periodically they leave the lit area, wipe their faces on their T-shirts, and quiet their breathing. Sometimes the blue

floor turns black for a few moments, as if to signal the end of a quarter. Before joining the men very late in the game, Fin Walker plants a small flashing device that might be a timer.

But the dancers have no goal or plan beyond the execution of the elegant choreography. Tall, slender Montes executes jiggly little steps, turning this way and that in a small area, while the shorter, more compact Burrows takes bigger steps, checking out the territory with his feet. The actions neither define them as personae nor have implications for the future. When Walker appears—the first of two women to enter the dance—the men cross and recross the space shoulder to shoulder with rapid, smooth tip-toe steps. Which seems both nonsensical and utterly reasonable.

For 45 minutes, to

soft intermittent piano music by Kevin Volans and Matteo Fargion, the performers make their moves. Burrows, formerly of the Royal Ballet, creates a finely designed, defiantly unballetic language focused on the rhythms of stepping and pausing: big spraddled walks, crouching ones, dodgy ones that pull the body and arms into complicity. It's as if we'd walked in on the pastimes of a peaceable alien culture: we don't know the rules, but, at heart, we understand the game.

*Quintet* (1997) involves more slashing arms and legs, episodes of intriguingly awkward partnering, more open turned-out moves. It, too, has the stop/go rhythms of a sporting event. And it, too, makes me think of the '70s. The score by Tom Johnson, then a *Voice* music critic, invites us to ponder our perceptions. While Burrows, Walker, Ragnhild Olsen, and Dana Fouras dance, Montes walks around a tree of four hanging chimes, striking each in turn; then he asks us such things as "Do you see the dance more clearly in the silence?" and "Is the dancing more profound than the music?" Back in the '70s, we'd have thought about these matters. In the '90s, the text simply enhances the rigor and imaginative plainness of Burrows's work. **V**