

DANCE

Preview

SILVERS STREAKS

Sally Silvers tackles the torrid tale of *Lulu*



Rehearsals for Sally Silvers's newest piece, *Pandora's Cake Stain*, an ambitious evening-length work, are proceeding rather smoothly. The ten dancers, most of whom are choreographers in their own right, don't blurt out questions and complaints; instead, they politely suggest ideas with the care they would give their own work. Still, Silvers is not having a good time.

"It's been hell trying to coordinate it," Silvers says of her first full-length work, during a break. "This rehearsal process has not been my happiest hour. It's been insane trying to keep things both up to speed as well as moving forward by having people present at different times. I don't know if I can work this way again, but I like large groups and contrasting each dancer onstage."

Pandora's Cake Stain, set to a score by Bruce Andrews, is based on Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*, which premiered in 1937. The adventures of the promiscuous Lulu are relayed: Her first husband dies of a heart attack after seeing her with another man; the second, a painter, commits suicide after finding out she's in love with another; her third commands her to shoot herself, but she kills him and ends up in a relationship with his son; and so forth, until she becomes a prostitute in London. At the end, the husbands come back to life as clients.

"The one she killed reappears as Jack the Ripper," says Silvers. "He's her most commanding husband, the

one who's the most in charge of her from the very beginning. That's how she meets her demise." Mark Robison, a dancer with a mane of dirty blond curls, portrays the killer. "He's the most ominous and fierce-looking dancer of the group."

Silvers doesn't have the financial or staff resources of a Mark Morris or a New York City Ballet, so *Pandora's Cake Stain* is quite an undertaking. She supports her work through teaching and grants, and supports herself through a part-time job at a political organization, the Labor Institute. ("I have full health insurance, and they let me come in when I need to come in," she says.)

And the concert marks the first time Silvers will work with lighting designer Jennifer Tipton, Silvers's favorite, who is more well-known for her collaborations with established artists like Paul Taylor and Jerome Robbins than downtown choreographers. "There aren't many people I listen to, but she has ideas about the overall design," Silvers explains. "She'll say, 'That transition is important because it affects not just that section but the entire way of looking at the piece.'" Silvers wrote to Tipton, who wasn't familiar with the choreographer's work, requesting that she consider the project. "I didn't know if she was booked into the millennium or not, or if my piece was too much of a small-potato kind of thing to do, but she works with experimental people, and she works with Twyla Tharp."

Equally spectacular are the performers, who act out episodes from *Lulu's* life. They include Seán Curran, Laura Staton, David Neumann and Eduardo Algeria. "I look for distinctiveness," Silvers says of the dancers she chooses. "It's not just a technical thing, it's something about how they show up onstage, how their movement registers, their interpretive abilities, how they stand apart from each other as well as work onstage. It's funny: They all tend to come to me with big personalities—there aren't a lot of shrinking violets."

Silvers has never been a member of a dance company. She studied ballet and jazz as a child in Tennessee, but during her adolescence was drawn to sports. It wasn't until she was a political science major at Antioch College in Ohio that her interest was sparked. She earned a double major and moved to New York, choreographing her first piece in 1980.

"I think I was a little odd to be in anybody's dance group," she says. "I wasn't a super technician and I'm not sure I had the right movement memory. I realized that I needed to find my own way instead of following the route that was there before me."

Silvers knows her work, because of its subject matter and modern, unconventional movement, isn't for everyone. Touring isn't really an option. "I don't think it's inviting in that way," she admits. "I'm not trying to displease an audience, but it's not the first thing I think of." For Silvers, creating dances isn't about enjoyment. "This is what I do. This is the way I fit. I think through movement."—*Gla Kourlas*

Sally Silvers & Dancers performs at the Kitchen Thu 13–Sun 16.

Time Out New York

June 12–19, 1996