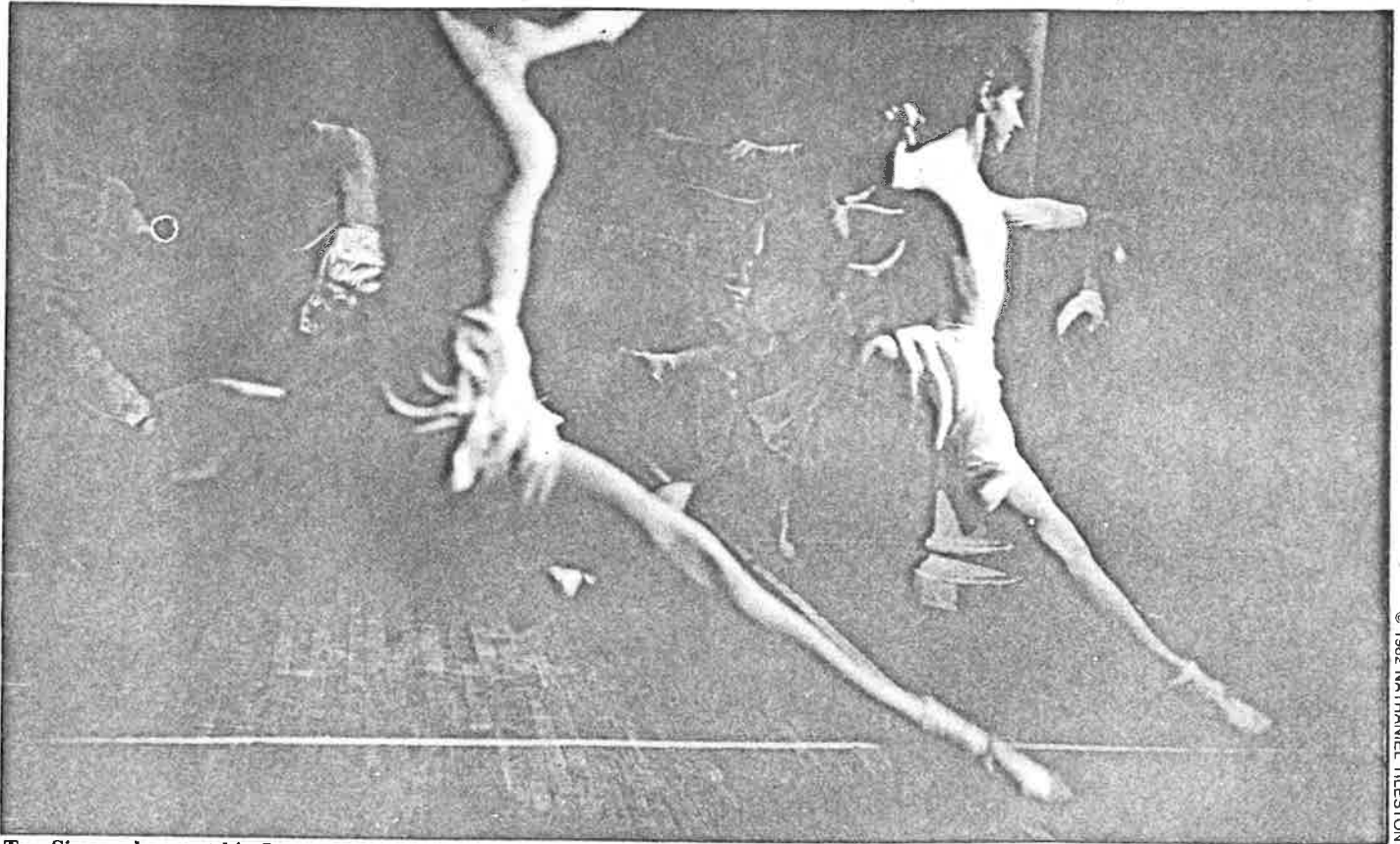


# DANCE 1



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Ton Simons lays out his *Spread*

## Data flow

THERE are two kinds of obscurity. In the first kind, one doesn't understand what's going on. In the second kind, one doesn't understand why it's going on. Ton Simons's concert was confounding in both ways. The first kind of obscurity applies to *The Knife Sharpener*, which Simons calls a tableau. The lights rise to reveal a bicycle standing upside down. Simons, in a jock strap, turns the back wheel. At the front wheel is Rick Merrill, looking awfully debonair in evening dress. He sharpens a knife on the spinning front wheel. After a while Simons pushes aside a curtain, revealing various-sized bird cages perched on various-sized stools. Within at least one of the cages is a large bird, which warbles. Simons wanders past the

cages. Merrill stays by the bicycle. Blackout.

*The Knife Sharpener* is by William Katz and Simons and is based on a scenario by Bruce Chatwin, who an informed source says is an accomplished British writer. The hurdy-gurdy music is by Gerald Busby.

The second kind of obscurity applies to the two other pieces on the program. *Tally*, a duet, and *Spread*, a group work, are absolutely dances. They move, move, move all the time, and not jelly-belly movement either. *Tally* slashes and kicks all the way home. It shows Simons, a name unknown to me, to be a technician of considerable strength and grace. His partner, Ellen van Schuylenburch, has already made a big impression in concerts given by other choreographers, but I don't think anyone has taxed Van Schuylenburch's technique to the extent that Simons has. Apart from demonstrating how dancers can jump onto a table as easily as a cat and extend their limbs as cleanly as, well, good dancers, *Tally* has no point. It's a junk heap of force. Moving, moving, moving all the time. It's the kind of dance in which a step looks like an idea simply because it's repeated.

*Spread* marks Simons as a student of Merce Cunningham, which an informed source confirmed. Nine dancers move in various ways through a grid pattern marked on the floor. *Spread* could be a super-Event in that the increments of dance Simons runs together are superrefined. Instead of combining big chunks of choreography as Cunningham does in his Events, Simons sprinkles the stage with fragments of exercises. I love those Cunningham phrases just as I love typical ballet combinations, such as glissade-pas de chat. For this reason I sort of enjoy classroom ballets such as *Etudes*. *Spread* might have been enjoyable had it been as up-front as *Etudes* about its intentions. But *Spread* presents itself as a dance proper, and as such raises certain questions: whence, and wherefore? No answers. Furthermore, each of Cunningham's Events has very pronounced rhythms, and it's those rhythms that distinguish one Event from another, making each a self-contained, new dance. *Spread* has no rhythm; it just has a couple of slow steps. It hammers home with methodical clarity. Its language is articulate doggerel.

THE SOHO NEWS, N. Goldner  
February 16, 1982

## THE KITCHEN