

# NEW YORK

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## Lost in Spaces

Two haunted retrospectives kick off the dance season: one with Bill T. Jones and his late partner, Arnie Zane; the other with Twyla rocking out. **BY LAURA SHAPIRO**

UNLIKE BALLET, WHICH thrives on its past, modern dance wasn't supposed to have one. Back in the sixties, when a generation of American dancers tossed out everything that had been canonized and codified and started working from scratch, the point was to express oneself, not to carry on a tradition. But tradition has a way of asserting itself: By the time any given pioneer started noticing that the dancers he or she was auditioning were getting awfully young, the company had a history and the early work was entrusted with senti-

ment. Modern dance is still an art that's free to choose its own boundaries, but that very freedom means that the technique, the passion, the ideas, and maybe even the moral impulse that once fueled the work have no assigned roles to play in the present. There's a past, all right, but what to do with it?

Anniversaries bring this question to the fore, and it's a particularly unwieldy one for Bill T. Jones, whose **Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company** celebrates twenty years this season. Zane, the co-founder of the company, who was also Jones's beloved partner and artistic alter ego, died in 1988, but the name of the company was never altered.

Arnie Zane's spirit is still part of

**BE HERE NOW:** Germal Yusef Barnes (top) and Wen-Chung Lin in Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane's *Duet x 2* at the Kitchen.

the air this company breathes. As for Jones, he went right on growing and changing as an artist after 1988—his avant-garde credentials are secure—but names have power. Jones is calling this anniversary season "The Phantom Project."

Phantoms were all over the place during the first performances of the season, which began at the Kitchen earlier this month and will continue at BAM in February. Photographs and video footage of Jones and Zane in the seventies and early eighties were screened during much of the program, and their voices were heard, sometimes while company members performed updated versions of the same

work live. Other times, company members had the stage to themselves, but with memory such a vivid element of the production, it was difficult to see these excellent, personable performers as dancers in their own right rather than as vehicles for channeling Jones and Zane. Still, the distinctive quality of that early choreography—*Valley Cottage, Duet x 2, Blauvelt Mountain (Fiction)*, and more—came through handsomely. Jones and Zane liked to work in movement bites back then, each interaction like a tiny portrait of an entire relationship. The combination of brisk formality and a deeply sensual attack, as if the dancers were speaking aloud in the foreign language of the body, was riveting decades ago and it's riveting today.

Jones himself danced a bit, and his presence had its usual dazzling effect: a towering black oracle delivering pronouncements through a body made of butter, silk, and fire. He also presided over the evening, and in this role he was almost ghostly, recalling the early years and once simply standing behind a shadowy door at the rear of the stage and gazing at his dancers. "Where is the truth about a dancer's life?" he asked at one point, showing old lantern slides of himself and Zane. "Is it there? Is it now?" His answer was pure sixties—"Let's be here now." For a dancer, that's the only possible answer, but as the whole evening quietly suggested, now has complications we never dreamed of back then.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JANET F. LEVITT

