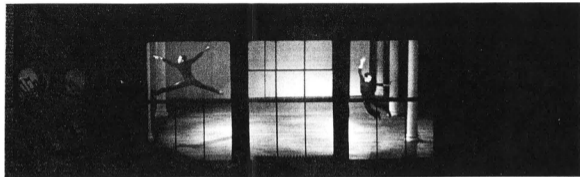


## Arts &amp; Leisure

Section 2



Bill T. Jones, left, and Arnie Zane, rehearsing at the Kitchen in its early days on Broome Street. The company they formed captured the playful, eccentric spirit that has characterized the Kitchen ever since. Photo: Court

By ERIC BOGOSIAN

THE photograph is of massive left windows peering into a vacant dance space. Two men, Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, are flying in opposite directions, like forest sprites, like madmen. No audience. Just empty space and two juggernauts. Paula Court had to climb a two-story ladder outside the building to get that shot. But that's what the Kitchen, the performance left down on Broome Street, was designed for — play, chaos, eccentricity. Anything could happen here, musically, photographically, visually. That was the aesthetic — push boundaries, have fun. The image of Bill and Arnie dancing in a window into another era, a golden age when the baton of one generation of choreographers was passed on to the next.

The left on Broome Street is no longer the home of the Kitchen, and Arnie Zane died in 1984. Me, I'm so far removed from "curating" the Kitchen's dance program that almost no one remembers I ever had anything to do with dance in New York City. But 25 years ago, the boisterous generation of artists was flooding into a dying New York. It was a time of tremendous idealism and energy, of

ambition and experimentation, of youth and career carnage. The premier space downtown was the Kitchen; hundreds and hundreds of performance and gallery shows were presented there. One of the most successful of those endeavors, celebrating its 30th season, is the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. (It returns to the Kitchen, at West 38th Street in Chelsea, on Sept. 9-14 and Sept. 18-20.)

I can't take credit for bringing Bill and Arnie to New York. They were coming and setting was going to stop them. But it's true that Bill and Arnie's work was ideally in sync with the dance program I was trying to establish in the late 70's. Like most "downtown" dance enthusiasts of the time, I knew modern dance, especially Merce Cunningham. And I was hip to the "postmodern" like Grand Union, Trisha Brown, Meredith Monk and Simone Forti. But me and my ilk were kids. We were restless, and as investigating and "experimental" as dance was, we felt something was missing. We spent our nights at CBGB's and Max's Kansas City. Where was that crazy punk energy in the dance scene? The last generation, the original left choreographers, exiled from the modern dance world, were a little too granola for my crowd, too Birkenstock. I began to look for choreographers who used loud music (Greta Otley made a dance to Lou Reed's "Metal Machine Music"). I wanted to see strong, intense movement that didn't look "natural," didn't look "organic." Of

**Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane meshed with the dance program Eric Bogosian was creating.**

course, there were older, more established artists like Kenneth King and Lucinda Childs who were plenty intense. And in other parts of town there were the traditional modern dancers in Dankin leotards skimming around under gobo-framed light. But what about something that felt like my generation? One day my bro, Mary MacArthur, showed me a crude videotape from these two upstate guys. Bill and Arnie. I think Bill was pushing a big wheel around on the floor. I'm not sure, I could barely see it. All I know is it was terrific.

A looking at the Kitchen at that time resonated the choreographer got a guaranteed thousand bucks plus half the gate (with which they had to pay their dancers and other fees), a poster (which I designed and taped up in SoHo), a video of the show (which I shot), such support (I hung the lights and ran the sound), and mention in the Kitchen's flyer. As far as this all sounds, it was the best deal in the city for a new company. Dance Theater Workshop made a similar deal, but they didn't have me design-

ing the lights and posters.

Bill and Arnie arrived like a force from another dimension. The two men, partners in life as well as in art, acted like aesthetic catalysts upon one another. They did (and still do, because Arnie's vision continues to be part of their company) incite the best in one another, always pushing physical, intellectual and spiritual limits. Arnie was a fierce man, strong and wild. Bill presents himself with a buxomian smile, barely hiding an equally wild and intense personality.

It's true that most, if not every, company is founded by a dancer. And usually, especially in modern dance, the company style reflects the physical personality of the founder. But this company was different. Bill T. Jones is a phenomenal dancer, beyond that a phenomenal presence (and to his credit, he has for 25 years surrounded himself with phenomenal dancers). But his personal style was only half the story; there was Arnie, a strong compact man, not the type you usually see as a lead dancer. Arnie had started out as a photographer. The two men formed an intense, almost repugnantly secret union that gave birth to an amazing style, making the deeply conceptual with the most devastatingly physical.

They brought to the dance world grace and intelligence. But they also brought aggression, something that interested me. They brought stillness. And they weren't happy just moving around. Language had to

be part of it, and has been ever since. Sexual politics, race politics, tremendous movement, a surreal soulfulness all were thrown into the mix.

The experimentation of the late 70's dance scene did not remain stable. The evolution had to proceed. Some companies returned to the traditional. Some couldn't survive, or hid out far away from New York on college campuses. Bill and Arnie persisted. They were dugged in their intensity. And then Arnie died, of AIDS-related lymphoma, and his passing only served to stoke the will of the company. The pieces that followed reflected a commitment by Bill T. Jones to memorialize his partner by never for a moment compromising a vision of physical grace united to a ferocious message.

I would like to think that this company's fully mature self, growing from two men to a half dozen or more dancers, began in the fringes of the Kitchen. On those busy floors (which I also washed), we, as a community of artists, experimented, made huge mistakes, watched each other grow, and finally, moved on. But part of the Kitchen was also finding a larger audience, beyond the fringes of SoHo. Here dozens and dozens of composers, choreographers, poets, theater people, visual artists, performance artists, found their voice and vocabulary. Then brought it to a wider world. A big empty left, a few posters, an audience. □