

DANCE

Vintage moves

Bill T. Jones resurrects old dances—
and his former partner—
in *The Phantom Project* By **Gia Kourlas**



CLEAR THE AIR
Bill T. Jones, left, and
Arnie Zane are
captured in the 1980
Blauvelt Mountain.

Before Bill T. Jones commemorates the 20th anniversary of his company in the usual, blowout fashion—an engagement at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in February will take care of that—he will revisit his choreographic roots in a more intimate setting. Beginning Tuesday 9, Jones unveils *The Phantom Project* at the Kitchen, where he and Arnie Zane, who died in 1988, presented early duet and solo work back when the space was still in Soho. “Not all of the pieces that we wanted to revive were appropriate for the BAM stage,” Jones says from his vacation in New Mexico. “We thought, Why not divide the anniversary into two parts and do an evening of smaller-scale works that were originally made for an audience of less than 200? Of course, the Kitchen was the sentimental favorite. That’s where Arnie and I had our first New York engagement together.”

The two-week season encompasses several revivals, which Jones has restaged. Along with the 1980 *Blauvelt Mountain (A Fiction)*, one of the famous pair’s first collaborations, the engagement includes Zane’s *Continuous Replay*, which is based on 45 hand and arm gestures that provide the framework for a structured improvisation. There is also *Duel x 2* (1982), performed by two sets of partners. And *Floating the Tongue*, a 1983 solo, is a classic talking dance by Jones, who will in-

roduce each evening and perform in at least one piece.

“I think they were important transitional works that connected the Judson Church/Grand Union period of postmodernism with what we know now,” Jones explains. “I wanted to bring more of them back, but it is quite an undertaking to teach them to people who barely know any of the vocabulary.”

For his dancers, the arduous challenge is twofold: To make the parts ring true historically, but also to make them their own. “There are three couples doing *Blauvelt Mountain*—they need opportunities to rehearse and to make their mistakes and discoveries, like Arnie and I had,” Jones says. “They also need to feel that I am approving of their struggling with the material. I think they’re very intimidated by that. I’ve tried to allow them to figure out the material on their own.”

According to Jones, one of the biggest tasks his dancers face is purely physical: building cardiovascular strength. “There was a way in which we were performing then that was quite different,” Jones says. “These dancers are professionals, and they work hard, but we no longer use our bodies in the same

crash-and-burn ways that Arnie and I used to do.”

Whether the dances hold up after 20 years isn’t entirely the point; instead, they offer an idea of the physical and intellectual rigor that Jones and Zane stressed in their earliest days. “I think that *Blauvelt* will be a bit of a revelation in its structure and its vocabulary,” Jones says. “Arnie and I were very fiercely postmodernist; we were not concerned with pointed feet or the heroic gesture or even the sophistication of production that people think about now. It was very rough, and the structure was doggedly formalist. *Blauvelt* takes time to perform—there’s a lot of repetition. People who think of us as being very accessible will be surprised.”

While the choreographer refers to the experience of rescuing the company’s early works as a rich one, it doesn’t mean he recalls his beginnings through rose-tinted glasses. “I will admit that when I looked back on it, I didn’t hate it,” he says. “When I think about Binghamton, where Arnie and I began collaborating, I loved my association with the people I was working with, but I didn’t really like it there. I realize now I have no nostalgia at all.”

Nor does he particularly pine for the East Village of the early ‘80s. “I remember the wild times at the Odeon and how everything seemed possible,” he adds. “It made one very courageous. Do I miss that? It’s like missing your youth, and I’m not there yet. I do sometimes wish there were more optimism around, but maybe I miss the optimism in *we*. I’m not doom and gloom, but I feel like now I have serious grim times to work my way through.”

The Phantom Project is at the Kitchen Tuesday 9 through September 20.

DON'T MISS...

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company

(See Tue 9) Bill T. Jones recreates early duets and solos in *The Phantom Project*.

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