

# DANCE

By Deborah Jowitt

**MOLISSA FENLEY AND DANCERS.** At the Kitchen (Sept 13-16). Fenley's *Mix*.

**THE ATLANTA BALLET COMPANY.** At the Fox Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia (Sept 14). George Balanchine's *Allegro Brillante*, Tom Pazik's *Bagatelles* and *O.P.O.S. 13*.

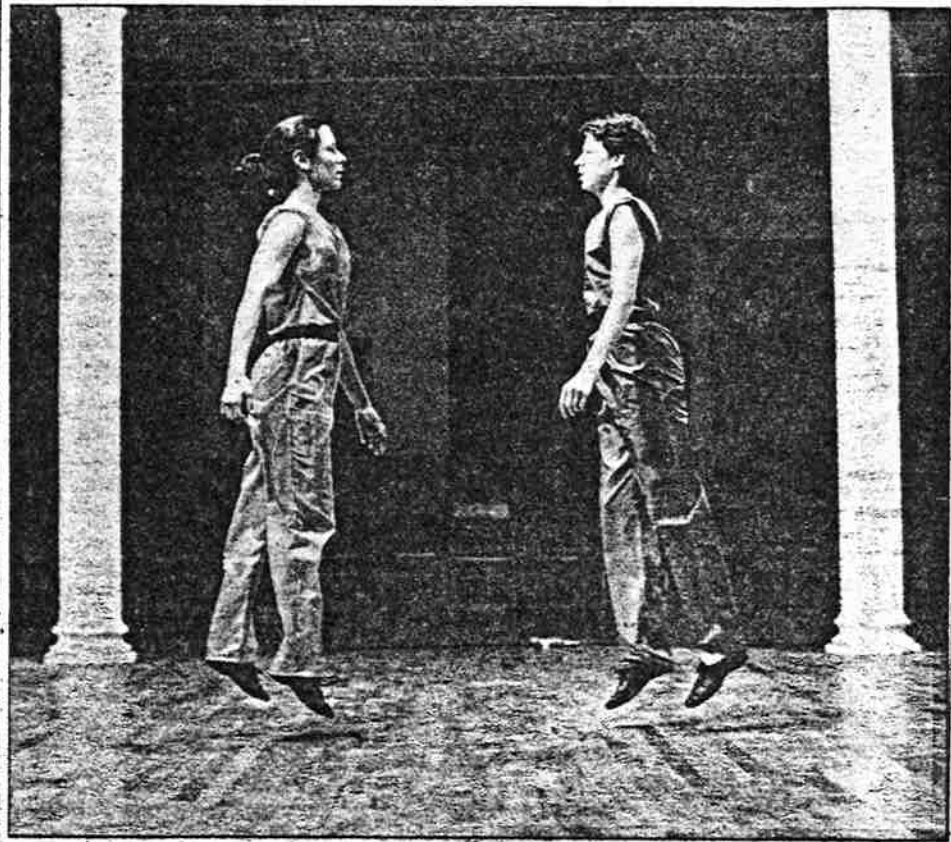
It doesn't seem so long ago that Laura Dean's first pristine group pieces surfaced to delight and dismay the New York dance audience. Yet second-generation Dean is already upon us. I don't mean to insinuate that Molissa Fenley, whose *Mix* opened this year's "Dancing in the Kitchen" series, is imitating Dean; but her work bears such a strong family resemblance to Dean's that it's difficult not to consider her as one who is plowing and planting ground on which someone else has already done the sod-busting.

For about 50 minutes, the performers of *Mix*—Fenley, John Bernd, Kate McLaughlin, and Elizabeth Streb—hammer patterns of brisk footwork onto the miked floor. Their costumes (by Carmel Johnson) have gaudy, space-age toughness—pants and sleeveless tops (one fuschia, one orange, one red, one turquoise blue) made out of what looks like synthetic lining silk. Much of the time, they face in toward the center of the performing space; often they meet, work together, and part in couples. The floor designs, the repetition, the chipper rhythmic footwork, the dancers' agreeable demeanor make you think of European folk dancing, but no real folk dance could be so adamant. Its rigor, its length suggest ritual; but it hasn't the shape of accomplishment—the large clear design that, when the dance is over, reassures you that something has been achieved, even if that something is intangible.

So the dancers stamp their feet and brush them, tiptoe and spring; they gallop or trot or chain-step across the floor; they run in place, kicking up their legs behind them or in front of them. Sometimes they stop and bob at each other, making stiff, angular gestures with their arms. Silence, when it comes, comes as a shock, because the hard, persistent sound of the dance seems to have become a fact about the room—as inescapable a part of it as the white and the pillars. The sound system Judy Fogelman has set up sometimes plays its own games with the sound, creating echoes and delays.

One of the most satisfying things about Fenley's dance is the meshing of heard rhythms. During the first part of the dance, the performers clap their hands. As they feed into a pattern, alter it, drop out of it, their hands and feet create intricate contrapuntal patterns on top of the driving 4/4 meter. Later, the dancers do a turn with sandblocks and one with maraccas.

## The Pathway Is Stony: Affirm or Deny



*Despite the simplicity of the steps themselves, the effect of Mix is strangely ornate and fidgety.*

The quick, punched-out vigor of the piece is exhilarating at first. When/if it begins to be wearying, I attribute the decline to Fenley's interest in short-term change and variety. She does gradually add steps, so that you can definitely note a new arrival. But her patterns don't, as I remember, take a large amount of space and time to resolve; you don't say to yourself that Streb is now doing the steps Bernd was doing in this spot five minutes ago and that in another five minutes she'll be back doing her own step in her own space. You see repetition, alternation,

symmetry without always understanding the relation of one act to the act that follows it, and, despite the relative simplicity of the steps themselves, the effect of *Mix* is strangely ornate and fidgety. It's as if you were watching a weaver, but as fast as she completes a few passes of the shuttle, a curtain moves to cover more of the finished work, so that, although you see her *doing* something, you never understand what she has done.

I would have liked to see *Mix* with an audience; in order to see it at all, I had to attend the final run-through. The four

juicier and more settled into their weight as they tired. The pace is so demanding that, in the beginning, Streb and perhaps Fenley were the only ones who didn't cramp their windmilling arm gestures in order to accomplish their own.