

March 11-17, 2009

**Dance**



**Armitage Gone! Dance**  
The Kitchen  
512 West 19th Street, 212-255-5793  
Through March 14

**An unruly organism: *Drastic-Classicism***

based herself in Europe, became famous, returned to the U.S., and formed a new company. Three dances on her Kitchen program date from the 1980s. In *Wild Thing* (1987), the ravishing Kristina Michelle Bethel, wearing a fringed black unitard by artist David Salle (Armitage's longtime collaborator), pumps her pelvis, grabs her crotch, and sweeps her improbably long, slim legs around. Tapes of Jimi Hendrix scratch her itch. Off comes the lid of an immense heart-shaped chocolate box by Jeff Koons (it's made of faux-granite and tied with a gold ribbon). *Quel surprise!* A man after her own... er, heart (Matthew Prescott). They snarl and smile and fuck the air between them. They pose like runway stars and dance like crazy. She winds her legs around him; he arches her backward. By way of a climax, gold balloons foam out of the box.

In pared-down, revised versions of *Drastic-Classicism* and *Watteau Duets* (1985), the behavior is a little less naughty but just as sensuous and extravagant. An arabesque may be destabilized by a sudden tremor in the dancer's high-thrusting leg. A woman sinks into a deep plié as if her intent were to expose her crotch. Elegantly pointed feet and ballet port de bras melt into swiveling hips and shrugging shoulders. Partner-

ing is a mutual exercise in complex, implicitly erotic tangles. You don't see how the heroic dancers get into them and can't imagine how they'll recover.

It's one of Armitage's gifts to make each of the 11 dancers in *Drastic-Classicism* vivid as an individual, even though they're prone to joining in tangles and chains, like an unruly organism in flux. Smoothness and delicacy are sometime things. There are few movements they can't deliver with a punch or a slash to match Rhys Chatham's music—with its drumming by Kevin Shea and the stentorian discords that four guitarists pluck out of their instruments. The dancers, all clad in Peter Speliopoulos and Karen Young's sleek but holey black outfits, embroil these musicians in their revels—nuzzling this one's leg, using another's shoulder for support. Abbey Roesner, sitting on Leonides D. Arpon's shoulder, reaches down to muss a guitarist's hair. He's unfazed.

**Excerpts from the new *Mashup* suggest it's a stunner.**

In *Watteau Duets*, Shea and keyboard player Tim Wildin fool around, exchange jackets, knock instruments over, whack a gong occasionally. Shea attempts a pushup braced on toms. All the while, they integrate themselves into a score by David Linton that at one point belches out the opening melody of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and composer Henry Cowell's musings on his career. Megumi Eda and Luke Manley first appear punked up in leather (her black pointe shoes disguised as boots), but they retreat from time to time behind packing cases and reappear in a variety of outfits (by Speliopoulos or Charles Atlas) that signal changes in the emotional weather. These two flaunt their sexiness less than the pair in *Wild Thing*. Their intrepid wranglings may seem aggressive (Eda clamps herself onto Manley's back like a crab) or peaceable (they hold hands and chain along in a semi-folk dance when a Celtic tune crops up), but they work at their encounters like virtuosic problem solvers.

Excerpts from the new *Mashup* suggest it's a stunner. The Armitage of the 1980s was tweaking her heritage with the gumption of a club kid; in this millennium, she has refined her style although not entirely tamed it (you have only to spy Bethel executing an impeccable balance in *passé* and then winning at us to understand that). Daniel Iglesia's score mingles live percussion and the punk band X-Ray Spex with scraps of Mozart. Wearing becoming red shorts and loose red tops (by Speliopoulos) and beautifully lit by Clifton Taylor, the dancers skid and leap with equal grace. Impudent as they are, they seem bound for glory. Such a flashing of legs, such speed, such fervor! They throw a stratospheric party and yank ballet into it.

After the opening-night performance, Armitage was made a Commandeur dans L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government. *Félicitations*, Karole!

**All Punked Up**

X-Ray Spex plus Mozart plus lots of legs: A night with Karole Armitage

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

**W**hen Karole Armitage showed her *Drastic-Classicism* here in 1981, the dance scene was pretty well mannered. Many adventurous choreographers had been focusing primarily on form and movement invention—you might have expected Armitage to do the same. After all, she'd begun her career performing Balanchine works with the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève and danced with Merce Cunningham's company from 1976 to 1981. Instead, she threw her smart mind and her wickedly long legs into punk—making rude, gorgeous, witty, sexy works that mated stretched-to-the-limit ballet with pop imagery and blasted us with music.

In celebrating the 30th anniversary of her first New York season, she returns us to that obstreperous period before she