

JUNE 8, 1993

Tender Trap

By Elizabeth Zimmer

Tere O'Connor

You Baby Goes to Tender Town

The Kitchen

May 20 through 23

What distinguishes poetry from prose—a sense of heightened alertness, of every syllable mattering, of meaning manifested in form—is the same quality that distinguishes choreography from ordinary movement. Tere O'Connor has been making poetic movement for years. That he makes it in a language we cannot always decipher is only the smallest impediment to our pleasure: something strange and seductive is usually going on.

In *You Baby Goes to Tender Town*, we are clued immediately to the decadent sensuality ahead when cords pluck a black scrim up into a boudoir-elegant ornamental swag. Blue light filters through it onto the cyclorama behind, giving the scene a violet cast. In silence, six dancers (three standing, three sprawled on the ground, identically dressed in dark trousers and cropped white blouses blanket-stitched in black) delicately caress one another. A hand swipes across a brow. A hand emerges from or disappears between a pair of legs. Two performers kiss. Two others vigorously mime copulation. Sprurts of Spanish guitar music accompany swooning and a little quartet in which a man (shades of Balanchine's *Apollo*) conducts three women upstage.

The partnering is assorted and ever-changing: men with men, women with women, men with women. Nancy Coenen, Chad Courtney, Jack Gallagher, Chrysta Parkinson, Sara Perron, and O'Connor are the perpetrators; this ensemble resembles Mark Morris's gang, diverse in size and appearance but technically strong. Lifting chores are assigned to the capable regardless of gender. The work's undercarriage, its deployment of steps; is frequently balletic; waiting for their next flurry of activity, the dancers stand in third or fourth or fifth position.

The organizing principle appears to be sudden titillation, impulses that strike like lightning, but instead of flirting and moving on, these performers let us see them sweat, steam, grope. O'Connor moves among them like a baby Diaghilev, anxiety and a hint of a leer playing in his expression. Toward the end, a waltz peters out on the soundtrack, leaving three couples executing triplets and kissing in silence as the scene fades to black.

Psycho-Sweet Civilization (for O'Connor, Gallagher, Parkinson, and Perron) is tame by comparison but still odd. O'Connor's collage score sounds like a car radio being tuned on a desert highway at night, pulling in smatterings of music from all over the planet, as well as sounds of thunder and rain. The dancers, barefooted, wear red leggings and pleated black skirts. O'Connor dances alone while the others stand at

attention.

His incomprehensible phrases of movement make at least some kinetic sense when three or four performers do them at once. The mind seeks meaning, order, clarity; O'Connor provides certain organized disturbances of stillness, stabs at human interaction. We wrap our attention around them, hoping for resolution, wiser even if it fails to come. ■