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By Claudia La Rocco

## WEEKEND **Arts** MOVIES PERFORMANCES

### A Relentless Wave Rolls In With an Inevitable Power

When Sarah Michelson is on, her work brooks no resistance. There is an inevitability to it, and a relentlessness, from which you do not, cannot, look away.

#### DANCE REVIEW

CLAUDIA  
LA ROCCO

Such a dance is "Dover Beach," which had its American premiere this week at the Kitchen. Despite the striking architectural and design elements (created with Parker Lutz), for which Ms. Michelson is known, and a live score of cinematic intensity by Pete Drungle, the roughly 75-minute work for 11 dancers, several of them youngsters, is stringently formal and pared down.

Yet its cool surfaces thrum with simmering heat, as well as with often disturbing power dynamics and erotic undertones, particularly in one dramatically lighted section toward the end that features Greg Zucculo partnering the diminutive, terrifically spooky Allegra Herman, who is just 13 and wears an inscrutable, world-weary face, like something out of a Velázquez painting.

Dressed in a high-necked black unitard, she seems in control, yet the duet ends with Mr. Zucculo carrying her, her head thrown back, into a narrow passageway behind the black paneled back wall. What fascinates here also repels, and Ms. Michelson is masterly in mining these tensions.

Ms. Michelson has said the seeds for "Dover Beach" were planted in 2007, when she observed a community ballet class in Cardiff, Wales. (An earlier version of the dance had its debut there.) Much of the movement language is balletic but made strange, as if reconfigured by an outsider. Ms. Michelson bores into repetitive, often fiendishly difficult phrases, laced with extreme balances and arches and extensions, and often requiring the dancers to remain in relevé for long periods of time.

Almost confrontationally stone-faced while they execute grueling passages, the dancers seem yoked to a force greater than themselves. Perhaps the force is oppressive social convention; when the bewitching Non



JESSICA EBELHAR/THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Dover Beach** Rebecca Warner in this program by Sarah Michelson at the Kitchen in Chelsea.

Griffiths, 12, dances, she does so with great skill, but also as a child wading into a not yet comprehensible adult world.

Or it might be the will of Ms. Michelson herself, who does not perform but appears to be rendered in Charlotte Cullinan's large green neon line portrait at the back. It is replicated later in two projections, a strange cult of self with which the artist has long flirted.

Marvelously stylized costumes by Elena Scelzi and Deanna Berg MacLean mix dance wear with street chic (hoop earrings, plunging scoop backs) and suggestions of period dress in riding habits, deconstructed formal wear and high-waisted pants. A pale yellow latticework of overlapping circles halves the stage, creating a cage of sorts on the right side, while the left is anchored by two rotating towers studded with stage lights.

These two sections seem like private and public worlds, or perhaps wild and tamed. As "Dover Beach" unfurls, the actual architecture remains, but the dance's structure grows more permeable, threatened by sweepingly tumultuous emotions. Voices whisper. We hear a recording of the Matthew Arnold poem "Dover Beach," which before was only hinted at in the sound of waves raking pebbles. A man (Oren Barnoy) in horse's head, with bared teeth and wild, rolling eyes, emerges. And these fierce, girl-women creatures, "swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight," fight on.

"Dover Beach" runs through Saturday at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 255-5793, [thekitchen.org](http://thekitchen.org).