

THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR
VIDEO, MUSIC
AND DANCE

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Paula Court

The work of **Johanna Boyce**, whose company, *Boyce Dances*, performed at the Kitchen September 25-28, was previously unknown to me. The evening began rather inauspiciously with a film called *A Weekend Spent Filming It*, made by Boyce, John Schabel, and Holly Fisher on Wyoming Island in the Saint Lawrence Seaway, Ontario, Canada, and showing members of the company and others engaged in such activities as fishing, cleaning fish, skinny-dipping, playing games. It looks like a beautiful place but, though there was much laughter from those in the audience who were in the know, I'm afraid other people's home movies exhaust my interest pretty quickly. If the film was intended to prepare us for the fact that the members of the company are non-dancers, that is something that becomes clear quite soon, but the film is amateurish in a way the dancing is not.

The dance part of the evening was a long work called *Out of the Ordinary*, a title that proved to be apt however you took it. That is to say, the movement is derived from pedestrian, quotidian activities, but in a way that's so brilliantly resourceful and imaginative that one might say that Boyce raises klutziness to the level of virtuosity. Her work is a logical development of post-modern dance: If dancers can do non-dance movement on stage, why shouldn't non-dancers dance? It's all very funny and engaging, but more than that, it's exhilarating, because Boyce is really making art, not just movement games for adult beginners.

She has, to begin with, a painter's eye; her use of the awkward space of the Kitchen actually turns its division by those awful pillars to advantage. I suppose, too, that she is responsible for the terrific look of the costumes — such as the flowered pants and shirts they all wear at the end. Most important, though, is that she has a choreographer's sense of order and timing, manifested in the seamless flow of the overall design as well as in the individual sections, such as a complex passing-and-tossing-coins routine that's done with hardly less expertise than Charles Moulton's precision ball-passing, or the series of tap solos and duets that follow (for which they tape the coins to the soles of their shoes). These last were choreographed with the help of Kate Nichols, one member of the company who has actually studied (with Andrea Levine), and each one is perfectly geared to the capabilities of the performers.

The average spectator looks with awe and envy at trained dancers, with their sleek, slender bodies, performing amazing evolutions with apparent ease. Looking at Boyce's people, with their imperfect bodies (they start out topless and later on sometimes strip down to their underpants), doing their frog-leaps or rolling across the floor, even forming into a chorus-line and doing a wonderfully clumsy time-step, the same spectator can say, with perfect truth, "I could do that."

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