

## DANCE

# Arts & Leisure

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By GIA KOURLAS

**R**OSEANNE SPRADLIN'S work is gritty, and not because her dancers have been known to wear as little clothing as a stripper at Scores. It is all in the way they move. In her candid pieces, legs splay awkwardly, breasts jiggle and bodies crash to the floor. Sex is treated with more brutality than tenderness. Ms. Spradlin is not fond of giving reality a coat of tasteful varnish.

"I think the problem with a lot of work is not that it's too strong or dark," she said recently at a West Village cafe. "It's just that it isn't good."

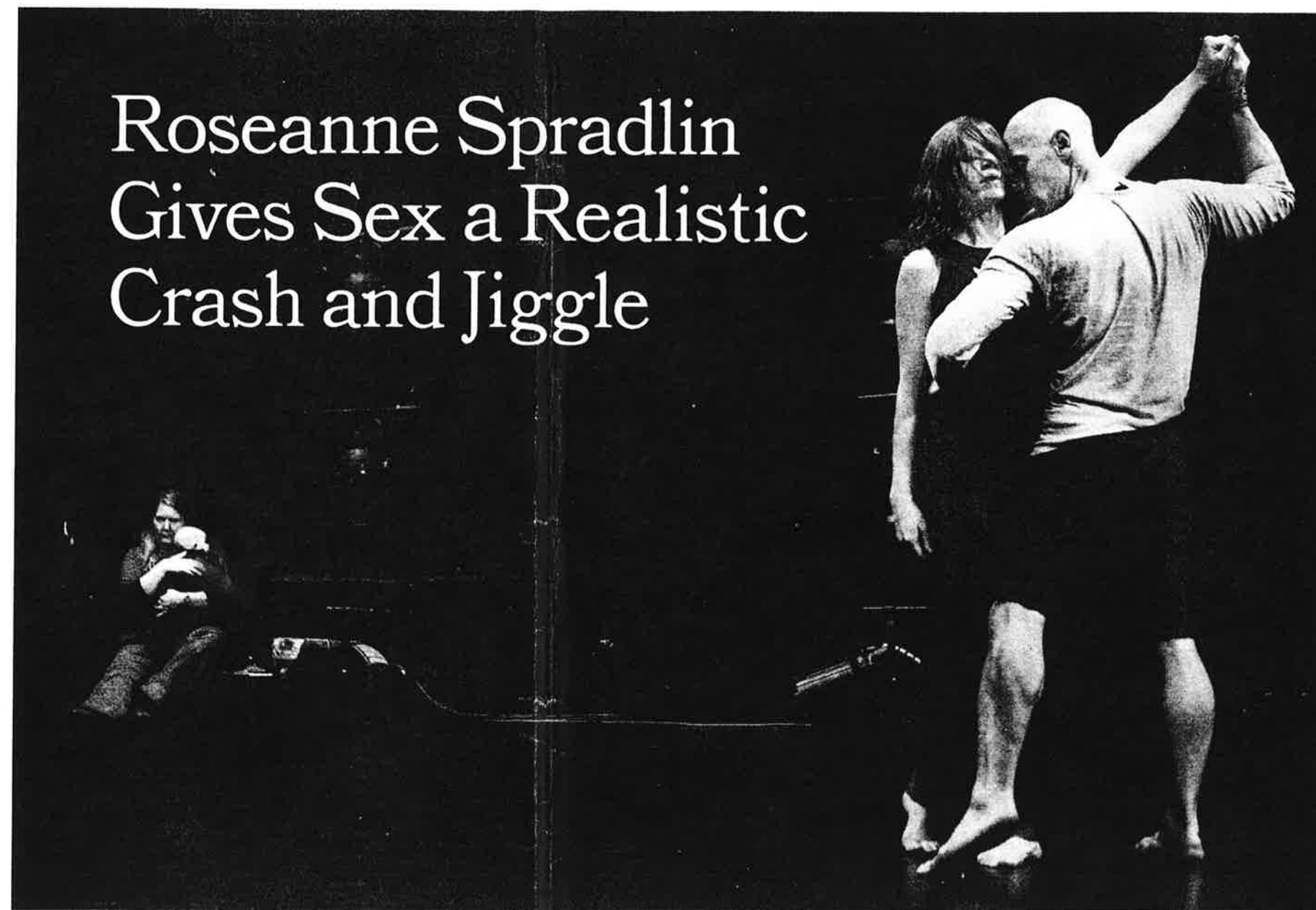
At 51, Ms. Spradlin, though blond, buxom and sexy without trying to be, is not the type of character one would expect to find in an S & M club. Yet in "under/world," a dance for three that will be performed at the Kitchen in Chelsea from Thursday through Nov. 15, she contends with issues of fetish, sexual manipulation and how one person yields to another. Even though she founded her company in 1995, the dance world seems at last to have caught up with her raw, luminous vision. In September, not only did she receive a Bessie, the annual award presented to outstanding downtown artists, for creating the work, but her dancers — Walter Dundervill, Athena Malloy and Tasha Taylor — won a collective prize for their haunting performance of it.

"For someone like RoseAnne, who's really steady in her conviction about her work, it makes sense that this is the way her career would happen," Ms. Malloy said. "She doesn't give in to anything superficial or hype-oriented, but she has a clear internal vision and is tuned into the world around her."

The Kitchen season will also feature the premiere of another dance by Ms. Spradlin: "Rearrangement (or a Spell for Mortals)," a duet for Mr. Dundervill and Ms. Malloy. Like "under/world," the piece features a score by Kenneth Atchley that sounds like running water, but this time the dancers explore issues of mortality in an appropriately enigmatic setting. For Ms. Spradlin, "Rearrangement" is still a bit of a mystery. But ambiguity is part of the point; she created the piece for the choreographer Amy Sue Rosen, who died of brain cancer in February at 48.

"I guess I wanted to make myself and others feel better about accepting the transient nature of life," she said. "But the piece has changed as it's been built. There might be more of a fairy-tale aspect now. When people disappear, you don't know where they go — you just hope for the best. At the same time, the piece is just about two people who intersect and then part. And that's the end. I think it might be the first dance I've ever made that had a motive other than me just trying to express myself." She laughed. "That could be for the better or the worse. I don't really know."

If anyone could pull off emotion without plunging into self-serving indulgence, it is the unsentimental Ms. Spradlin, who hails from Oklahoma City and does nothing without exacting deliberation — even the way in which she gradually wedged into the dance world. She began her career as a visual artist. "I didn't really



Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

Tasha Taylor and Walter Dundervill rehearsing Roseanne Spradlin's "under/world" at the Kitchen in Chelsea while Ms. Spradlin holds Ms. Taylor's son.

switch over to dance until I was at graduate school at Ohio University," she said. "I moved to New York at the relatively late age of 31. There was a long period of time where I didn't know what to focus on. But in a way, I feel lucky that I took a long time getting going — now, the dance world is more open than it used to be."

Ms. Spradlin's experience in the mainstream dance world is not extensive, but she did teach one summer at the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C. It did not go well. "I had no idea that people were still back in Martha Graham days," she said, mystified. "The older people teaching composition would say things like, 'You have to be able to hold your arms out for 20 minutes in

order to be a real dancer!' It was insane. I was outspoken, and I got blackballed. I don't know if those institutions will ever wash away, but I've become comfortable with my outsider status. Luckily, there's been enough support from here and there to keep going."

She studies Chinese medicine at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine in Manhattan and is more than halfway through the grueling four-year program, which she described as "kind of like medical school." Her eventual degree, she hopes, will enable her to open a clinic and support her artistic projects herself, rather than rely on grants.

While Ms. Spradlin, in her unruffled, pragmatic

way, credits her recent success to timing, she does recognize that she is at a turning point in her career. "I just hope that there will be a little bit more of a ball rolling now," she said. "I also think I have to try to keep it rolling. It's hard. I want to say that I don't really care about getting my name out there, but in order to keep working you have to. I think a big part of it is stepping up to that challenge. Despite my age, I've never really been ready to do that. That's why it was great to win a Bessie. I thought: 'I'll just take it. I won't invest it with any more meaning than it has, but on the other hand, it's nice to be recognized.' I was just really happy. And I felt like I deserved it."