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DANCE REVIEW

Alone in Time's Essence

By JENNIFER DUNNING

On the surface, "Lucinda Childs: Solos" is as simple as its title. The program, which opened on Wednesday night for a three-week engagement at the Kitchen, consists of three solos created over a 23-year period by Ms. Childs and several longtime collaborators. Ms. Childs is effectively alone on stage. But a great deal is going on in this superb evening of theater and dance. And much of it has to do with time.

Ms. Childs's play with time is at its most complex in "Dance #4," an excerpt from her 1979 "Dance," set to music by Philip Glass with film by Sol LeWitt. Projected onto a scrim, the black-and-white film depicts a towering Ms. Childs dancing across a white grid, sometimes playfully and sometimes with a spare, virginal intensity. The picture is split at times, with the dancing figure seen from several perspectives. Behind the scrim, a live Ms. Childs keeps slipping onto the shadowed stage, then disappearing.

We are looking at Ms. Childs's past and present, in an experience of simultaneity made even richer and more dizzying by the fact that none of the versions is precisely synchronized, though the choreography is largely the same at any one moment. Together, as a filmmaker in the audience observed, the elements of live theater and film create the kind of instantaneous layering of time that is usually the magical province of film alone.

The emphasis is on Ms. Childs today in "Underwater," an excerpt from "White Raven," a 1998 opera by Mr. Glass and Robert Wilson, performed with Johanna Hegen-

cheidt. Everything comes together in "Description (of a Description)," which takes place on a small raised platform designed by Hans Peter Kuhn and Mathias Hofman and adapted by Jonathan Belcher. In this solo, an American premiere, Ms. Childs plays an anonymous person possessed equally by anguished memories of a failed love and by questions about a man fallen in the street and the experience of stumbling over him.

Susan Sontag's 1987 text fractures and merges time, creating a dazzlingly evocative fugue of memories and fresh experience. One thinks — hungrily — of theater by Nathalie Sarraute and Simone Benmussa, the French director who cast Ms. Childs in the strangely unforgettable 1982 play "The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs."

There, Ms. Childs played a nunlike woman forced to masquerade as a man in late 19th-century Ireland. Here, and in "Underwater," she has the husky-voiced glamour and sharp, glancing beauty and artifice of a French chanteuse of uncertain age. Ms. Childs still moves fluently. Even better, she has lived.

The lighting, always an important element of Ms. Childs's dance, was designed by Mr. Kuhn and Pat Dignan. Mr. Kuhn composed the eerily murmuring score of sounds and disembodied voices reiterating the text. Gabriel Berry designed Ms. Childs's black shirt, trousers and billowing coats.

The program, which celebrates the Kitchen's 30th anniversary, will be repeated Wednesdays through Saturdays at the theater (512 West 19th Street, Chelsea).