

## Dance

# Self's Seductive Skill

By GARY PARKS

If you start to become seduced by the intense visual glamour of Jim Self's dances, shake yourself so that their sturdy kinetic virtues don't get obscured. In his appearance at The Kitchen May 26-29, Self showed three works, all visually compelling. If one of them—a duet excerpted from the forthcoming *Beehive*—is merely decorative, the other two, *Perpetuator* and *Heaven and Earth*, would be striking even if stripped bare.

*Perpetuator* shows off Self as choreographer and dancer, and he's working at a high level in both roles. Commissioned last year by the American Dance Festival, *Perpetuator* indicates Self's background

with Merce Cunningham (in whose company he danced for three years) in its large-scale technical requirements. When he or Lisa Fox, another Cunningham alumna, leap into the air, their strong legs fan out like a hawk's spreading wings.

Self calls for many such leaps and great ground-covering strides from Fox, Jon Mensinger, Teri Weksler, and himself throughout *Perpetuator*. Small details of gesture and time embellish the grander steps. Mensinger and Weksler stand at one point with torsos so tensed you can see the biceps stand out on their arms. This doesn't happen instantaneously; it takes a few moments for the tension to build. At another point, Self repeatedly looks toward Fox, not so much to see her as to let us see the whites of his eyeballs as he

June 22, 1983

WASHINGTON MARKET REVIEW

rotates them. Later, Self flicks his tongue, recalling a serpent.

This is not the usual kind of detail one sees in western art dance, where action of the whole body or of specific limbs is more often the norm. Certain Asian dances do emphasize such gestures, and a slightly Oriental cast in *Perpetuator* is strengthened by Naomi Lane's beautiful red and black reversible vests, whose broad shoulders hint at Japanese robes. Frankie Mann's taped score combines the sounds of trains, a rainstorm, newscasts, and snatches of music, all of which surround the dance with an aura of different times and places.

Despite the potentially disorienting mix of all these elements, *Perpetuator* is never vague. It unrolls inexorably, like a computer printout. Heightened street make-up erases the performers' individual imperfections, transforming them (Mensinger in particular) into gorgeously purposeful dancing machines. The dancers meander about long, knife-sharp pathways until some higher order calls them to a halt.

*Pas de Deux*" would benefit by cutting.

The solemn *Heaven and Earth* is a group of sketches from Robert Wilson's opera in progress called *The Civil Wars*. The excerpts are accompanied by A Lenoy's taped score, which doesn't seem weighty enough to support, or even co-exist with, this grave dance. The work is set for *Perpetuator*'s four dancers, costumed by Christophe de Meill to suggest Plains Indians of the American Southwest, plus Rob Besserer, who functions as a sort of tribal deity.

Besserer is a giant of a man (knowing, he's nearly as tall as Weksler when she stands) as well as an accomplished dancer. He is dressed in a heavy red lambskin, with black triangles painted on his face and a thick collar of black leathers around his neck. He also wears a headless with ears. The other men are similarly attired, though bare-chested, possibly to indicate some sort of subservience to Besserer's central figure. Fox and Weksler have heavy white dresses and ribboned head pieces, and Fox, at least, seems to have powdered her body white.



"Perpetuator"—Jim Self.

After the tough, unyielding beauty of *Perpetuator*, you're apt to forgive Self anything—even the unlikely "Flower Pas De Deux" from *Beehive*. There's a kernel of a funny idea here—all about what might happen if a young bee met a flower that didn't just stand there, yet even Frank Moore's witty costumes can't cover up the paucity of movement material. Hope Gilleman, as the peripatetic luchsia, begins in a shoulder stand, her legs thrust into the air like ripe pistils. By dance's end, Weksler's worker bee dives into Gilleman's lush petals, but in between nothing much happens. Since the conclusion is tongue-in-cheek, it's the getting from A to Z that must intrigue. "Flower

Luckily Self's powerful choreography can support this vivid production. Weksler, for instance, in a beautifully realized performance, stretches into many high-held arabesques, and the accumulated resonance is awesome. Self makes significant use of different combinations of dancers, so that one may elect to see a whole society in the permutations of the dance. When, toward the conclusion, Besserer processes down a ceremonial alley formed by the other dances, and bends forward to slap the floor, the simple act is made momentous. The enigmatic convergence of god and man concludes with an unexpected onslaught of darkness, as Moore's bright lighting suddenly decays. ■