



Liberty
Mutual.

Responsibility. What's your policy?™

Is a compact car driver
more responsible than
an SUV driver?

Responsibility. What's your policy?™

The New York Times

Monday, June 19, 2006 Last Update: 12:13 PM ET

DANCE REVIEW | 'THE K SOUND'

'The K Sound,' Choreography by Michael Portnoy, at the Kitchen

-
-
-
-

By ROSLYN SULCAS
Published: June 10, 2006

"The K Sound," Michael Portnoy's new work, which opened at the Kitchen on Thursday night, is a paid-in-full member of the "we are so avant-garde that you are terminally uncool if you don't appreciate us" school.



Richard Termine for The New York Times

Damon Patric, left, and General Judd in "The K Sound" at the Kitchen.

This 17-person piece can't be identified as dance or theater or music. It uses all these forms but employs so few of their technical underpinnings that specific analysis is impossible. The text is often garbled and nonsensical, the mode of delivery akin to being bludgeoned over the head. The choreography is basic, to say the least. The music, by Pete Drungle, is self-indulgent on a very large (and noisy) scale.

But in performance art of this kind, all of this can be presented — as it is here — as intentional and ironic. If we don't understand that, well, so much the worse for us.

"The K Sound" does get off to a cracking start. (Warning: spoiler ahead if you intend to see the work tonight.) As the house lights go down, an argument that has been simmering between two men in the front rows, drawing nervous looks from other audience members, erupts into physical violence. But just as everyone's worst fears are about to be realized (big guys fighting! in a theater!), the pair fling themselves into a stylized, spotlighted struggle onstage.

Mr. Portnoy goes nowhere with this clever opening vignette, which has the best acting and the best movement in the piece. The following 90 minutes are devoted to the increasingly baroque ramblings of an academic who collects experimental jokes. (The title refers to what is supposedly the funniest sound in the English language.) Some of the conceits are humorous, notably a tale of exiled kitchens that wander in the woods trying to find themselves, illustrated by some of the performers. (Kudos to the costume designer, Angela of ThreeAsFour, for conceptualizing what various kitchens might wear.) But Mr. Portnoy finds no way to elaborate on or extend his stories beyond increasingly frantic activity, loud singing and portentous declamation.

Art doesn't have to be coherent; it doesn't have to be understood. It may be as mad as it pleases. Sometimes the most profound artistic experiences come precisely from what we can't explain. But those experiences come about because a work has, in one way or another, enlarged our sense of the world. In "The K Sound," the joke is on us.

Michael Portnoy's "K Sound" can be seen at 8 tonight at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 255-5793 or thekitchen.org.

