



April 29, 1983

THE NATIONAL VOICE

Do you have a job? Do you have a place to live? Do you have friends or family? Do you have any money? Tim Miller, a native of Los Angeles and creator of several performance pieces in New York since 1980, set out last year to find the answers to these and other basic questions. The Tim Miller Survey of Human Happiness probes into what makes people happy, cheers them up when they're low, makes them consider suicide, makes them decide against it. His performance piece, *THE COST OF LIVING*, premiered last week at The Kitchen in New York, and it dramatizes the survey's results. Mr. Miller apparently concluded that life is a sort of tightrope walk between flying and suicide. The members of his cast all made a parachute jump last year to heighten their awareness of this tension. The performance included a video recording of the jump, but unfortunately the T.V. screens were too far away from the audience to convey any of the excitement. The musical accompaniment to the evening was a muddy mixture of Beethoven, music by Tim Miller himself, and the soundtrack from the movie *Ben Hur* that together succeeded in creating a confused tension. The actor-dancers jumped, spoke, pretended to fly, danced with suitcases, and hung from the ceiling, and they were the best part of the performance. They expressed powerfully the mercurial phases of human happiness — the anger, nervousness, highs, and lows that go into a lonely day. Unfortunately, Mr. Miller's narration did not link together the scenes into a coherent whole. He merely recounts some of the ways people get by in life — they go to the movies, brush their hair, walk the dog — as if he had read all the surveys but not digested or distilled them. *THE COST OF LIVING* is powerful and vivid in spots, but ultimately it's not too different from reading a stack of surveys. This is the National Voice from New York.