

DANCE

Preview

Twins set

The resilient Cathy Weis clones some of her friends

Cathy Weis gets to the phone a bit breathless; she's in the middle of loading equipment into the Kitchen—the venue where her latest work, *Gravity Twins*, will have its premiere. "We're at the cord stage right now," she blurts. "Getting all the lines in." Waiting to be carted in next are television sets, video cameras, mixers, movie screens, projectors and lights. In her latest electronic endeavor, Weis focuses on one question: When technology and the human body become partners, who leads? "I become obsessed with invisible forces," she says. "For me, it's gravity—I'm [always having to] drag my leg—but with other people it's the bonds between them. I wanted [to depict] unusual relationships, so I 'made' twins."

Weis is no ordinary choreographer. In 1990 she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The gravity she speaks of is the disease itself, which has taken hold of the right side of her body. A former ballerina, Weis incorporates video into her performances as a way to keep dancing. Although she worked with video in the early '80s, she didn't begin to seriously examine the juxtaposition of live dance and video feedback until 1994.

Gravity Twins features three sets of "twins." The first pair is circus performer Jennifer Miller and the fearless Annie Hobst; the second, improviser Ishmael Houston-Jones and virtuoso dancer Jennifer Monson; the third, Scott Heron and Weis herself. The choreographer is a bit secretive about the details—she likes to surprise her audience. But she does allow that "each section uses electronic imagery quite differently. The first one is kind of a wild burlesque show with television sets being flung around. There's a lot of live video. The second is much more austere and dreamlike, kind of shadowy, with movement coming out of memory and personality. The last one is very quirky. Feathers and plastic bags fall from the ceiling."

Gravity Twins is a continuation of Weis's last show, *Fractured, Just the Fracts Ma'am* (which earned her a Bessie award). In that work, the choreographer was intrigued by the "visual decisions" audience members made: Would they watch a video of a dancer or the actual dancer? This time around, she's more concerned with revealing her dancers' personalities (conveniently, they're all her close friends). Each of the three pairs of twins conveys a different mood, from raucous to zany. In the second section, Monson dances behind a large screen; a light shines



Lost in space: Jennifer Monson floats by in Weis's (bottom right) *Gravity Twins*.

on her back, distorting the shape of her body. Through the screen, the movement—mostly limited to her arms—is delicate and frenetic, resembling the flickering motion a moth makes when caught near a lightbulb. But the tone changes quickly when Monson punches the screen and pushes it forward, sending it on a wild spin across the stage.

Weis, a faculty member at Bennington College, is now teaching her unique blend of electronics and dance to young, aspiring performers and choreographers. "I created a course called 'Technology in Performance,' she says. "I thought I was basically going [to teach] so I could have a studio to work in. But I became very interested in making my students comfortable with technology. Three of them are here working on the show, helping me."

At the moment, Weis's health is good, although she tires easily. She works with a physical therapist and, time allowing, studies yoga and tai chi. "I've been very mature in dealing with this performance—I've been taking care of myself so that I can keep going," she says. "I know my own rhythms. I can't work all day. I have to lie down at a certain time; I have to eat; I have to exercise. And I just can't run around like I did when I was 20." While she doesn't like to dwell on her illness (and won't disclose her age), she is open to talking about it. "My mother had MS, so I grew up with it," she says. "She didn't have the opportunity to see other possibilities. This generation is so much more open. I want to tell my story and encourage people that there are ways to make their lives stronger."—Gla Kourlas

Cathy Weis presents *Gravity Twins* at the Kitchen through Sunday 8.