

# BACKSTAGE

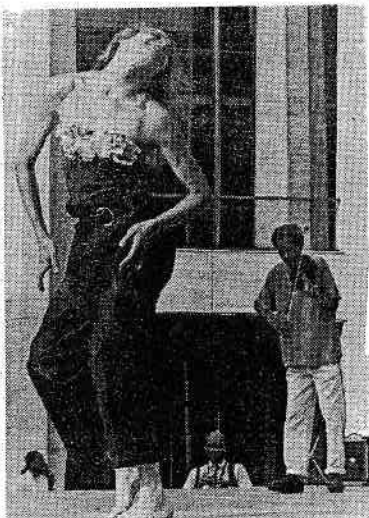
April 14 - 20, 2000

The Performing Arts Weekly

Price: \$2.75 (NY, NJ, CT, PA) \$3.25 (Elsewhere)

## Contemporary

BY LISA JO SAGOLLA



Julie Lemberger



Julie Lemberger

(Above and below) Felicia Norton (top photo) with Leroy Jenkins, violinist and composer in collaboration.

### Felicia Norton: Find Your Depths

A truly individual artist, Felicia Norton has carved her dance career as a solo performer. Yet unlike most soloists, she does not perform her own work, but rather the works of celebrated choreographers who create pieces especially for her. In the financially strapped world of contemporary dance, Norton suggests that, as a soloist, it might be easier for her to work consistently, since solo performances are cheaper to produce than ensemble productions.

Norton traces the start of her contemporary career back to a summer workshop she attended in Saratoga Springs. There she took classes with modern dance luminaries Pina Bausch, Paul Sanasardo, and Manuel Alum. After seeing her dance in class, Alum invited Norton to join his company, but she turned him down because she wanted to finish college first. Alum re-extended his offer as soon as she graduated, and Norton performed with his company for the next seven years.

When Norton left the company, one of Alum's former dancers, Joan Lombardi, asked Norton to dance with her group. Dance presenter Ocoola Bragg, who saw Norton there, recognized her as an exciting soloist and began facilitating collaborations with choreographers such as Mark Dendy and Lynne Taylor-Corbett. "From that time on," Norton explains, "I worked primarily as a soloist. I didn't go out and seek any of this. It was like a gift. People would ask me to dance for them. I didn't really audition ever. And

oftentimes the place where choreographers see you," she says. "It's mostly through personal connections that dancers get work—someone sees you, they feel your being, and a chemistry develops between the two of you. That's how the connections are made."

## The Dancers WHO GET THE WORK...

'Stay in touch with why you dance.'

— Felicia Norton

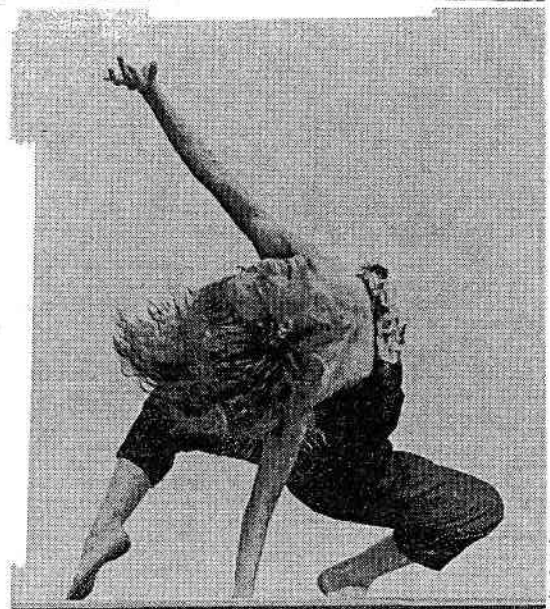
# AGAIN and AGAIN

Ocoola commissioned all the solos so I never had to pay for anything."

Norton realizes it's easy for dancers to get discouraged, and advises them to "always stay in touch with why you dance and maintain a strong understanding of who you are. To be a good dancer you must have some inner depth.

"It's not just about technique."

Norton feels it's important for dancers to attend workshops and take class regularly. "That is



Julie Lemberger