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Dance: Joan Lombardi

By JENNIFER DUNNING

The Joan Lombardi Dance Company and Novensemble appeared on Thursday at the Theater of the Riverside Church (Riverside Drive at 120th Street) in the most frustrating of programs. Miss Lombardi has a fine company of dancers, and her taste and intelligence are reflected in the dances' muted themes and in the costumes and sets. She works with interesting new music scores, played on stage for two dances by Shem Guibbory, a violinist with a most appealing presence.

The program got off to a promising start with Lynne Taylor-Corbett's Brechtian "Unpublished Dialogues," a suite of trenchant observations on relationships between men and women. But from there it dwindled. In Miss Lombardi's "Segak," set to a broodingly atmospheric score by Walter Carlos, the six dancers assumed leaning, swaying and lunging shapes that would have delighted a literal-minded sketcher.

From time to time a white panel passed slowly across the dim stage, depositing and enveloping dancers in its wake and becoming, by the dance's end, an irritating *deus ex machina*. The pace was speeded up in Miss Lombardi's "Papyrus," set to more energetic music composed by Steve Reich and played by Mr. Guibbory, but the look was the same.

"Paper Castles" was an ambitious new work by Miss Lombardi that utilized a commissioned score by Jeffrey Levine, played by Mr. Guibbory and Mr. Levine, and a pretty castle created by Robert Bayley. The vivid colors of George Hudacko's skirts and tops enhanced the look of fantasy of this lilting ritual for six women and an errant man. But the ritual was not rooted in any time or place, though

Deborah Klein's awkward narrative of would-be memories attempted it.

There was a memorable closing solo for Felicia Norton, a dancer of such gentle radiance that she seems to draw in all the light of the stage about her. And her disappearance into the castle, which turned into a cloud chamber, was a lovely bit of stage magic. But "Paper Castles" could have been so much more.

The cast included Sarah Stead, Celeste Hastings, Fern Zand, Heidi Michel and David Marsden. The company, which performs again tomorrow, was completed by Alfredo Gonzales, Alex Dolcemasolo and Kevin Irving.