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REVIEWS

The Salon Project
Dia Center for the Arts
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Reviewed by Rose Anne Thom

When any series includes a ritualistic ceremony with seventeen male dancers, a postmodern tango to Eartha Kitt vocals, and a trio of two men and a gas-powered lawn mower, its curators—in this case Susan Osberg and Joan Duddy—have done their job justice. The Dia Salon Project is particularly impressive because it harks back to a centuries-old tradition of sharing art in a social setting. Refreshments are provided for audiences, and a generous performing space for artists. The intimacy of the environment may be one of the reasons why duets had such potency in this series.

In Heidi Latsky's explosive *Chapter*, she and Alice Kaltman punched out clear semaphore signals with their arms as they established a pattern of codependence. Propelling themselves beyond a small circle of light, they revealed the complexities of their relationship in alternating explosions of clearly shaped, full-bodied dancing.

Gina Paolillo and Carl Flink tore through JoAnna Mendl Shaw's pungent *Ugly Waltzes*, to the music of Poulenc, with extraordinary skill and musical sensitivity. Their bodies, together, created a continuous line of motion rushing through the air and slithering down to the floor. But the lyricism was fractured by abrupt changes of direction. They took each other's weight in a manner that was

unexpected, and the hazards were not camouflaged. She hung from his neck. He seemed to support her by hers. Their passion was ferocious.

Irene Hultman's *Three by Eartha*, for herself and Jodi Melnick, was strongly influenced by the sensuous wit of Kitt's songs. The women wrapped their limbs silkily around her husky sound or mocked it with grotesque clichés of stereotypical sexuality. Unlike the other duets, in this dance their relationship was one of nuanced rhythms initiated by the music and translated by their bodies. Their subsequent solos were obscured by Kitt's vocals, but as works in progress they promised much.

"Three Related Duets," a premiere from a larger work, *Attempts*, by Gina Gibney, differed from the other duets in its emphasis on the clean sculptural forms constructed by two bodies. Dancers Lewis Bossing, Erica Henderson, and Rob Kitsos built a quiet drama through repetition and the sequencing of the three duets, eventually becoming less static, more acrobatic and daring.

Most of the solos chosen for the series suffered less from the paucity of ideas than from the interminable repetition of them. But Felicia Norton articulated a wide range of feminine images in Tamar Rogoff's *Crossing to Safety*. While the John Zorn accompaniment hinted at war and confrontation, Norton's interpretation enlarged the imagery to a metaphor for life. The repeated positioning of her head thrown back, even in the most forceful and resilient moments, implied vulnerability. Norton's costume, designed by Rogoff, was an outstanding short strapless dress of burgundy crushed velvet that gave her a timeless presence.

Sipapu: The Land Where Your Eyes First Opened, the piece by Maher Benham for seventeen men, was distinguished less for its choreographic invention, which consisted of group patterns, than for the sheer numbers and ages of the men, ranging from early teens to much, much older.

There was also the matter of the lawn mower. Steven Craig's dance, "...You Know...So My, You Know... and, I Know..." had its moments of humor and pathos, but nobody who breathes the polluted air of New York City on a daily basis appreciates being stuck in an enclosed space with a gas-powered lawn mower. ■